From Low Ebb to

Flood Tide

By

G.M.W COTTON

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CONTENTS

PAGE

Chapter I

Off to a Good Start 1-7

Chapter II

Upstream to Cobden Bridge 8-15

Chapter III

Welch’s Yard 1904-1909 16-18

Chapter IV

The Present Site 19-29

Chapter V

First World War and the Twenties 30-36

Chapter VI

Boats and Boating in the Twenties 37-41

Chapter VII

Oars and Sails – The Thirties 42-49

Chapter VIII

Through more War Storms to the Present Day 50-54

Chapter IX

“Honoris Causa” Our Trophies and their Winners 55-62

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

The Clubhouse Today frontispiece

The Club’s first home 9

Trip to the “Swan” – 1894 9

Regatta Day – 1895 10

Racing Cars circa 1895 10

Carnival (1) 1910 21

Carnival (2) A year later “

Opening of present Headquarters, Saturday 2nd May 1914 22

Committee in Office at the time 22

“Venetia” of Netley 27

“Saxon” on Brownwich – 1934 27

Whaler “Saxon” putting into Newtown – 1951 28

“Pixie” above Cobden Bridge – 1930 28

Camping (1) At Hamble circa 1912 56

Camping (2) Off to Brownwich – 1933 56

Jubilee Dinner January 1950 – Held in Club Hall 57

Cover design executed by Miss Mary Rivers

ST, DENY’S AMATEUR ROWING CLUB

Presidents of the Club since its inception

1889 – 1895 Rev. B.G. Hoskyns Vicar of St. Denys

1896 – 1907 Rev. E. Jedkins, M.A. “ “

1908 – 1925 Rev. L.L. Etheridge M.A. “ “

1926 – 1928 Mr. W.E. Green

1929 – 1947 Mr. C.H. Gordon

1948 Mr. G.Cotton

1949 Mr. G.H. Hoare

1950 Mr. G. Rivers

1951 Mr. G.M.W. Cotton

1952 Mr. K. Buckett

1953 Mr. D. Turnbull

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many months have passed since the Committee decided to produce this work and in the interim between writing and going to press, it is regretted that three of the members mentioned herein, Messrs. Matthew Hooker, Walter Yeoman and Maurice Andrews have passed on.

In preparing this history of St. Deny’s Amateur Rowing Club, the author wishes to acknowledge with grateful thanks the most valuable help given by his father. Without it the task would have been almost impossible. Many thanks are also accorded Mr. Don Turnbull for his contribution to the story of boating in the thirties, and indeed to all who have in any way added to the tale. Grateful thanks are also extended to all members who have lent photographs. We wish we could have published them all, but we had perforce to confine our attentions to those best illustrating the text. Mr. Ted Dyer kindly loaned the photo of the firm’s first premises.

The author would like to thank the Sub-committee including Messrs. J. Bayley, P. Isaacs, G. Rivers, D. Turnbull, R. Watridge and G. Wetherill for their many valuable suggestions, patience and encouragement at all times.

G.M.W.C.

Chapter 1

OFF TO A GOOD START

Sixty years is not a very long time in the life of a nation, but it can be said without contradiction that no other period of time has witnessed such changes and upheavals as have occurred from 1889 when our story opens, until the present day. Against the background of present uncertainties related to the post-war world in which we live, and the accelerated tempo of life itself, it is interesting to reflect that Queen Victoria had by the date mentioned, already celebrated her golden jubilee in an atmosphere of world peace. Indeed it was then unthinkable that this Country would be drawn into a continental war. Life was still sedate – and tolerably secure, for the internal combustion engine and electric power were hardly in being. The motor car was but a converted horse drawn carriage, and a novelty enjoyed by a very few well to do folk, whilst the aeroplane was as yet a remote possibility. Indeed this was still the age of steam – and what is of more interest to us – of sail – for the fine old windjammers of the earlier part of the century had not yet been superseded.

These were the days of low wages and cheap commodities. They were also the days of self-made amusements. The cinema had yet to be invented. Neither was there organised sport for the millions as now. These facts contributed largely to the undivided enthusiasm that one finds associated with clubs and societies in days of yore, and must have undoubtedly contributed largely to the successful re-establishment of our Club.

Southampton was rapidly developing as a seaport. The London and South Western Railway as it was then known had proceeded far with the conversion of the mud flats of the Itchen – Test confluence into docks which were destined to attain worldwide renown. Yet the town itself, expanding well beyond its original walls was still confined to the rivers, and bricks and mortar had hardly begun to mar the beauty of the eastern bank of the Itchen from Southampton Water to Woodmill. Weston was still a delightful little village. The yard where Thorneycroft’s is now, known then as the Woolston Naval Works, stood in fields. Itchen village was flourishing as a fishing community giving to the yachting fraternity of the day, a line of doughty skippers whose names have become world renowned for their skill, and to seagoing folk at large, a type of boat that likewise has merited a well deserved place in the story of local boat design. The road to Bitterne wended its dusty way past Miss MacNaughtan’s estate and the site of Clausentum, and thence up through the toll gate on Lance’s Hill. The railway bridge over the river was but five years old, and Cobden Bridge, built in 1883 had yet to bear the burden of the first electric tramcar to Bitterne Park. Lord Swaythling’s estate extended down to Cobden Bridge and the “Oaks” were a reality there being seven, of which only one now remains. On the west bank of the river, the iron horseshoe bridge for vehicles over the railway had not yet been constructed. St. Denys was still a village very much in the open. The remains of the Priory stood in a field, and the church hall where many of the earlier Club meetings were held had not been enlarged to its present size.

It was in such circumstances as these that, on May 7th 1889, a group of parishioners of St. Deny’s met in the old Parish Room under the chairmanship of their Vicar, the Rev. B.G. Hoskyns, afterwards Canon Hoskyns “to consider the best means of forming a Rowing Club in the Parish.”

Canon Hoskyns, himself a rowing blue, by calling this meeting, became the actual founder of the Club. Later on he donated the Challenge Cup which is named after him which is still the much prized trophy awarded to the winner of the annual Skiff Tournament.

After the meeting had elected a Mr. W.R. Frankling as secretary, the following rules were framed and adopted:-

1. That the club be called the “St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club, to consist of a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Committee of 8 members and an unlimited number of Members within the tything of Portswood and Bitterne.”
2. “That a General Meeting of members to be held on the first Tuesday in every month at 8p.m. to receive members subscriptions, elect new members etc.”
3. That the management of the Club and election of new members be entrusted to the President, Vice President, Captain, Vice-Captain, Treasurer, Secretary and eight members to constitute a committee, five to form a quorum.
4. “That the committee have power to elect new members, members to pay 1/- entrance fee and 6d. monthly subscription.
5. “That previous to rowing in the Club, every member must pay his entrance fee and first months subscription. That no member be allowed to row in any Club match until he has been a member for 2 months and paid his subscription.

At this juncture the officers and the committee were elected after which the meeting was adjourned until Tuesday the 14th, when the remainder of the original rules were agreed upon. These are now added.

1. “That the boats be used for the first time on Saturday next (18th) and that every member shew his card before using the boats.
2. “That the galley and skiffs shall not be used for more than 1 hour after which, members using them are required to report themselves at the Boating Yard every half hour. That the Pair Oared skiffs be used for two hours until 4 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and until 2 o’clock on Saturday. After times stated they must not be out longer that 1 ½ hours.”
3. “That a book be kept at Mr. Dyer’s in which members using the boats must sign their names and state what time they leave the yard.”
4. "That the Captain shall have authority to engage the galley on any day or for any length of time for training members without reference to any other engagements by other members, the Captain to post notice of his intention to use galley at least one day previous. Any five members may reserve the

Galley by giving notice one day previous, the galley not to be used by more or less than 5 members at any one time.”

1. “That members using boats be responsible for any damage (other than fair wear and tear) done to same while in their charge.”

A comparison of these rules with those found on a current membership Card reveals the fact that the basic principles which they cover and much of the phraseology in which they were frames, have stood the test of time. Emendations have been made as changing circumstances and departure from original policy have demanded, but even to this day, committee-men are called upon at times to differentiate between carelessness in the use of a boat and – “fair wear and tear”.

From its inception we see too that the members were content to leave the running of the Club in the hands of the Committee, even in the matter of election of new members. Quite early in the life of the Club, an amendment to Rule 4 was proposed “that the members be elected at the General Meetings” but was defeated.

To return however to the first meeting, there were present besides those already mentioned, Mr. Miller (afterwards Alderman Miller), Captain Gibbs, Messrs. Arthur Yeoman, J and R Windebank, Albert and Bill Dyer, Laming, Mitchell, Burch, Jarvis, Sobey, Wilton, Waterman, Holdaway, Porter, Masters, Hinwood, McCalmont and probably others whose names do not appear in the minutes but are recorded in the first Accounts Book and Regatta Programme. It is largely to the initiative of these gentlemen that the Club owed its existence. Time has sadly depleted the ranks of its founders, but it was with great joy that we were able to bridge the years and contact the past in the person of Walter Yeoman, brother of Arthur mentioned above. Mr. Yeoman, still hale and hearty in spite of his eighty odd years joined us in our recent Diamond Jubilee Celebrations and later sent along a photo of the 1895 Regatta held from his premises hard by Cobden Bridge.

The officers were then duly elected, the Rev. Hoskyns – President, Mr. H.L.B. McCalmont – Vice President, Dyer – Captain, Capt. Gibbs – Treasurer, and Messrs. Jarvis, Porter, Burch, Mitchell and the Windebank bros., formed the first committee.

One can well imagine that the framing of the original constitution must have taken up the best part of evening, and indeed the meeting was adjourned as stated, until the following Tuesday. Meanwhile the Committee met in a boatyard which was then in existence on the east side of the railway where it crosses Priory Road. It lay at the end of the garden of the house adjoining the railway in Priory Road, and the premises were reached by a path between the footbridge connecting this road with Dukes Road and the house. Two sheds stood on what are now allotments between the railway and the sweep of the present vehicular bridge. Here the Dyer brothers started their boatbuilding and hiring business and the idea was for the newly formed Club to hire boats for the use of its members and to operate from their premises. So we read that it was arranged “that the Club should have the use of 1 four oared galley, 2 pair oared skiffs and 2 skiffs for the season for £12”. The Committee’s action was approved by the adjourned general meeting held the following evening.

One can well imagine the eager anticipation with which the following Saturday afternoon was awaited, and how after duly presenting their cards for inspection to the appropriate official (it is not clear from the minutes who the scrutineer was) several young men hastened to take their places in the boats for their first row as members of St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club, a Club that was by dint of hard and unselfish work on the part of successive generations of members destined to become the concern we are all so proud to know today.

The first venture was so unsuccessful that it was found necessary to raise once more, at the June general meeting, the question of membership, and it is interesting to read that the committee’s recommendation to restrict membership to the tything of Portswood and Bitterne, was endorsed. The Club starting as it did, as a Church organisation, it followed that this ecclesiastical limitation was the appropriate one to apply to it. Moreover, since rowing was going to be taken seriously it was considered fitting that its colours should be a combination of those of the Older Universities.

The First Regatta 1889

It was of course natural enough that the young Club should want to run a regatta. September 14th was agreed upon, and the St. Mary’s Rowing Club through its chairman the Rev. Trueman offered the loan of a couple of galleys for the occasion.

So Charged with interest are these earlier events in the life of the Club, that one finds it impossible to dismiss them with but a brief reference. Every word of the records – every name and event mentioned strikes a chord of memory particularly among the more senior members today. Therefore one makes no apology for outlining in greater detail the story of those inaugural days.

The Regatta was held off Dyer’s yard and although little information is available of that occasion, we have the programme and result as recorded in the minute book.

“A Regatta was held on Saturday 14th September off Mr. Dyer’s Boat Yard.

A meeting was held in the evening at the St. Denys Parish Room at which Lady Wilson presented prizes to the successful competitors as follows:-

1. Skiff Race 1st Prize W.Green 2nd Prize M. Hooker 3rd Prize W. Dyer
2. Swimming “ I. Sobey “ H. Faithful
3. Paired Oared Skiff Race “ E. Dyer “ A. Dyer

W. Green C.H. Chalk

W. Windebank W.A. Davey

1. Canoe Race “ A. Dyer “ C. Jarvis “ T.G Loader

5 . Galley Race “ “Whitemouse” “ “Albion” “ “Jingo”

J. Windebank W. Dyer G.Harvey

E. Dyer W. Green W. Windebank A. Dyer J. Sobey C. Sobey

M. Hooker C. Jarvis W. Jarvis

T.G. Loader J. Downer C.H. Chalk

6. Skiff Race “ R. Windebank J. Windebank G. Harvey

7. Pair Oared race “ W. Laming “ C. Sobey “ C. Jarvis

R. Windebank J.Sobey F. Wilton

W. Hinwood W. R Franklin W.Windebank

8. Galley Race “ “Whitemouse” “

W.Davey

F.Wilton

G.T.Loader

W. Windebank

A.Dyer

9. Duck Hunt “Duck” T.Downer Chasing Crew J.Sobey, C.Sobey,

W.Green, M.Hooker

The Rev. B.G. Hoskyns proposed a vote of thanks to Lady Wilson which was duly seconded and carried with acclamation…..etc.”

The very first race and its result straightaway claims one’s attention. The three members whose names are recorded, had lifelong associations with the River and have directly and indirectly contributed much to the character of the Club. Walter E. Green “Walley” to successive generations of members joined the Club in the June and immediately threw himself heart and soul into the new organisation. As a young man he was endowed with great physical strength, and by dint of hard training hew own the skiff race for the Club Captaincy, and from 1896 the date if its presentation, until 1904, only his name figures on the plinth supporting the “Hoskyns” Cup. He was also able to enthuse others. Walter Yeoman recalled how Walley would get his crew out at six o’clock in the morning for training and the stiff backs that were suffered in consequence! Although a keen sportsman, yet his name will be honoured among members for his work in running the club when later he was joined by George Cotton, Charlie Gordon, Albert Beer and Frank Gosselin.

Matthew Hooker, Still hale and hearty in spite of ninety odd years, was a doughty rival of Walley’s in those days. Indeed the rivalry extended to happenings ashore. The method of “raising the wind” for a regatta was to contact all the people of importance in the locality and ask for donations or prizes. “Mat” recalled among other things how he used regularly to have more subscriptions on his card than anybody else. His rowing days with the Club were short lived but later on he entered the sailing races that became a feature of later regattas. He eventually built “pixie” which came into the Club’s possession in the early “twenties”. In her day she was the fastest boat on the river.

Bill Dyer and his brother Albert built up for themselves a tradition of good craftsmanship and even today the majority of the “inside boats are “Dyer” built. Even after the Club became independent, a very close and cordial connection was always remained with the firm. Only on rare occasions was this relationship disturbed.

The First Regatta was also a success financially, a profit of nine pounds being made. It is interesting to note that someone won a half ton of coal costing 11/6. Whilst the brass band consisting of at least eight instrumentalists blew themselves red in the face for the princely sum of £2.

A social evening followed the regatta to which members of St. Denys Football and Cricket Club were invited. The minute of this event is worth recording, and the reader is left to picture the scene for himself and compare with an up-to-date dance shall we say, in our own hall.

“A Social Evening of the rowing Club was held on Wednesday 13th November, 1889 at which there were present the Rev. B.G. Hoskyns, Capt. Gibbs, Dr. R.Ives, Dr. R.Y.Ives, Messrs. Shanks, French, G.Franklin, J.Sobey, Hinton and many others. Bagatelle boards were kindly lent by Dr.Ives, Mr. G.Franklin, and Mr.G.Warr – Chess, draft and dominoes by Messrs. Porter and French, Mrs.Fuller catered for the wants of those present assisted by Mrs.Robbins, Mrs.Ives, Mrs.Evans, and other ladies. A pleasant evening was spent in participation of various games and amusements provided, interspersed with vocal and instrumental music.”

So ended the first season. The records show that the membership was just over 50. Financially it had been a success, for the Balance Sheet published in the following April and circulated to all members showed a profit of £10,13.1. From the November to February of the following year general meetings were held for the purpose of paying subscriptions, and the committee met to discuss future plans.

Dyers once again offered the use of the same boats as in the previous season for the sum of £13 from April to September. It was ruled that the Vice Presidency should be rowed for and that the course should be from MacNaughtans Castle to the Iron Bridge and back. It is interesting to compare this course with the “Hoskyns Cup” course of more recent times. The former is approximately 1,000 yards whilst the latter from the present stage to the “Oaks” and back is 930 yards.

In the early part of the year the Rev. Bruce Cornford M.A (Cantab), a young varsity blue, came to St. Denys parish as a recently ordained curate. He joined the Club and was straightaway made captain for that season. Possessing a remarkable personality, he later on became a leading figure in the affairs of Portsmouth where he became vicar of St. Matthews. A great sportsman, he became prominent member in a dozen Portsmouth sporting organisations including the Football club. He could be quite unorthodox in his actions to the extent of raffling a barrel of beer at a Church bazaar, yet he was fearless in expressing his convictions as was shown by his public protest every Good Friday against League Football matches being played on that day. Bruce Cornford rowed for the Club on many occasions and both he and the President kept their varsity oars in the Club room which had been fitted out by the Dyers especially for the use of Club members.

Of the many problems that were considered by the Committee were two of more interest than their fellows. One was the decision to limit membership to those over seventeen years of age, a rule that holds today. The second was the purchase of the first Club boat. Already, under the terms of the agreement, Dyers were allowing the Club the use of their galley “Shamrock”. Then it became known that another galley “Jingo” was for sale for the princely sum of £3. Who was making this offer is not exactly clear – certainly not Dyers’, for one of the brothers was asked to inspect her. A deal was made and Dyers were asked to carry out any necessary repairs to her. Interesting stories are often told today by our forebears about the purchasing power of the £ in those palmy days, but one may well be dubious of such a purchase as this. Indeed she proved to be as leaky as a basket and needed much attention, but she was a BOAT – and could be made seaworthy. Furthermore she represented the very first step towards independence that, during those earlier years, the young Club strove to attain. In passing, one is led to reflect on the possibility of buying even the rudder and yoke today for the price that was given for the whole boat then.

The second season followed much the same pattern as the first one. Racing fixtures were arranged with neighbouring clubs including West Quay, Coalporters and St.Marys. The Regatta too was run on much the same lines as the original one save that canoe and double sculling races were included in the programme. Canoeing was quite popular up the Itchen till as recently as the First World War Mention is made of a station boat being lent to the Club “as in the last Regatta” and later on in the records she is mentioned by name as “the steamer LUCY and EMMA”. The owner was a member of the very well known Bowyer family, pilots in these waters for a great many years. A very important feature of these occasions of course was – the band, and no function was considered complete without one. Finances being limited, choice of band depended, as we have already hinted, on the ability to produce the maximum of wind (or noise) at a minimum of cost. As accommodation was very limited at Dyers’, guests and sightseers were rowed out to the station boat whilst the band livened the proceedings from a pontoon made by boarding shallows just in front of the yard.

During that season, swimming occupied the attention of the committee Walley Green offered to teach members to swim and the use of his boat for that purpose and the Club appears to have accepted, but there is recorded a long argument about members bathing from Club boats and one minute reads ‘….In supporting a proposition “That Club boats should be used for rowing purposes only”, Mr. Jarvis drew attention to the serious danger this pernicious practice involved, and trusted that the lives of the members would no longer be exposed to such serious risk. ‘Feeling at that particular meeting was equally divided but this motion was eventually carried by one vote. Later an attempt to rescind this motion was lost again by a narrow majority.

The Club was now shaking down to some sort of ordered routine and in consequence we find the members concerned with rounding off the rough edges of its constitution, making racing fixtures with other clubs and running the annual regatta. In March 1891 Franklin resigned and Walley Green and

J.Wyatt took over as co-secretaries. In the December of that year, a certain Mr. Perkins offered to run a concert in aid of purchasing a racing galley. The secretary was requested to make enquiries regarding the price for building “a first class up to date craft”. The matter was raised again at the general meeting by Capt. Gibbs who was the prime mover in this effort and a sub-committee was formed of which Mat.Hooker was a member. He relates how he bartered with jack Pickett of the firm Picketts, West Quay, and was instrumental in seeing that certain improvements were incorporated and that splash boards were omitted. These latter were considered unessential and a serious addition in weight. Pickett finally agreed to build for forty guineas, two thirds of which had already been raised by the Club and by proceeds from the concert. The boat was eventually built and brought round for the launching ceremony at the annual regatta. The Hon. Mrs. Elliott Yorke a recently elected patroness of the Club performed the ceremony, and Matt’s recollection of that auspicious occasion is of the champagne bottle being broken in such a manner as to soak the Rev. Bruce Cornfords’ trousers with its contents. The “Dionysius” as she was now called, can be regarded as the Club’s first brand new acquisition, but events were to occur which necessitated her disposal. Besides the launching of the “Dionysius” this regatta was marked by two other innovations, a Novices Skiff Race and a Sailing Race, in which members of the Itchen Sailing Club participated. Further reference to this Club is made later on in our story.

Chapter 2

Upstream to Cobden Bridge

The young Club, by now firmly established in the parish of St. Deny’s and recognised by the rowing fraternity of the day as capable of entering a galley crew to be reckoned with, was not well off financially. The subscription of six shillings a year, small though it was, represented the average sum of money a member could then be expected to pay. The Club, particularly at regatta time looked to its patrons, whom it elected as presidents or vice-presidents in recognition of their financial help, and the regattas themselves were run largely on the donations of local tradesmen and well-wishers.

For all normal purposes the subscriptions were the mainstay with perhaps the proceeds from occasional concerts run to swell the funds. The new galley “Dionysius” had yet to be paid for, and the search for funds to meet this bill – in part at least – and to pay the annual rental to Messrs. Dyer became acute. An approach was made to them for help by reducing the number of boats assigned for Club use. They were not only unwilling to let the Club have less than £12 worth of boats per season, but were still less keen that they would own their own. This was understandable for this bid for independence was after all a threat to their livelihood. At the May Committee meeting ’93 the suggestion was made to look elsewhere for a suitable site, preferably a shed with a lake at the back. Precisely what this meant is not clear, and the only conclusion that once can draw is that

There must have existed on the banks of the River, sheds standing by creeks from the parent stream. Well, we are told that the Dyer brothers heard of the Club’s intentions and straightaway gave three days’ notice to quit!

Thus fell the first major crisis, destined however, to be out of short duration, Walter Yeoman whom we have already mentioned and who was as enthusiastic as any, offered to sub-let the end of his garden for the same rental as the club had been paying, namely £4. He lived in the house, and rented the property now owned by Messrs. Dyer Bros’ immediately to the south of Cobden Bridge.

The agreement was on a triennial basis, and recently, the writer was privileged to read a renewal entered upon by the Club and the owner of the property in 1898 which is still in the possession of Mr. Ted Dyer and reads:-

“Agreement made between,

Walter Edwin Green of the one part (Secretary of St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club) on their behalf and Henry Frooks Ellery of the other part.

The aforesaid Henry Frooks Ellery agrees to let, and the aforesaid Walter Edwin Green agrees to take for the term of three years, all that piece of land abutting Cobden Bridge, a part now railed off by hurdles, being a part of land belonging to Fir Grove Estate and being used now by them for boating purposes……”

The area of ground let is indicated and blank spaces left for insertion of measurements which was never carried out. The yearly rental was to be £5 and the agreement concludes:-

“All Boating houses and staging that has been and may hereafter be built or erected shall be deemed the property of the aforesaid Rowing Club and may be removed by them at any time during their tenancy providing all the rent due has been paid, and should the rent not be paid within Twenty Eight days at the end of each year, then the aforesaid Henry Frooks Ellery or his executors may re-enter and take possession.

Witness (Signed over a 6d. late Victorian)

(Signed) Walter E. Green

Thomas Edward Ellery May 23rd. 1898. “

The point of immediate interest to us is that Mr. Frooks Ellery is grandfather to our present Secretary Mr.Cyril Ellery and the witness is his uncle and older brother of his late father.

So the Club accepted the notice – short though it was and proceeded with the few boats it possessed to its new ground. Teddy Barnes, a carpenter by trade was given the power to purchase timber and to superintend the building of the Club’s first Boat House. In July 1893 the Committee held its first meeting in its new headquarters and rightfully “thanked Mr.Barnes for the energetic manner with which he superintended the construction of the new Boat House”.

Thus a decision on the part of Messrs. Dyer which might well have spelt “nemesis” was turned to good account. The Club now had its own Headquarters which were destined to be the centre of activities for the next ten years. In the following season the Vicar donated material to make a dressing-room. This was 10ft. square with varnished matchboard and locker seats. A small table stood in the centre with an oil lamp hanging from the rafters. I can just remember the dressing room when it stood in Welch’s Yard, and later, on the present site.

The Club’s total assets were insured for £100, quite a lot of money in those days and certainly more than a year’s salary of 90% of the members.

About this time a new venture for buying boats was embarked upon. Members were invited to take up to 2/6 shares to be paid out by ballot as funds permitted. There is a record of 66 shares being taken up by 22 members. By this means, the “Bird of Freedom” was purchased for £4, and later on skiffs and a pair-oar. It is worthy of note, that on a number of occasions later, the Committee resorted to this means of raising funds. Meanwhile, the “Dionysius” proved a millstone round the Committee’s neck and was not paid for until the middle of ’95, but not before she had been badly damaged, almost beyond repair.

A light stage 3ft. wide and extending just to low water was erected but with nothing like the stability of the present structure at the Priory, and a decision in ’95 to purchase 5/- worth of bacon boxes for staging, reveals all too clearly, the quality of the structure as well as the Club’s flimsy finances! As the posts rotted off, it assumed the property of a switch back. It was taken up later and transferred to Welch’s yard where portions were used for a similar and shorter structure.

But let us now turn our attention to the membership of this period; Walley Green’s dynamic personality was already asserting itself in the Club’s affairs. His oarmanship earned for him the captaincy of the galley crews for several years and he also assumed the joint secretary ship for a time, a post in which he was able to have no small part in the conduct of the Club. It was he who promoted the Boat Purchase Fund. Walley was also well established in his career as a draughtsman at the Ordnance Survey Office, and by his enthusiasm for the Club, persuaded a number of colleagues to join. So from that time until recent years, there had always been a strong Survey contingent, and at one period there were as many as thirty members who came from the Survey. Among these was George Cotton who joined in ’94. He had been playing football for Freemantle Church at the time when the Saints were St. Mary’s Football Club and George Muir and George Carter were playing for them, but as the result of a knee injury he was obliged to give up. With him joined his brother Alf. That year, Walley, the brothers Cotton and an Alf Cox trained together as a galley crew. One of the Dowdings also joined about this time. Then in ’97 the Gordon brothers, Charles, Alf and Reg, joined, along with Albert E. Beer who was setting up business for himself in the ‘Valley’ as an engraver. At the turn of the century Arch Ewing and his brothers are mentioned.

Arch is a solicitor and the Club was soon to value his professional skill and to avail itself of his services which he placed at its disposal. Arch, is still the Club’s honorary solicitor and he has steered it through a number of tortuous

Legalities over the last 50 years. When you visit him he likes to tell tales of youthful exuberance on Committee nights in the little dressing room already mentioned. At the close of the meeting someone would shout “Cave” – extinguish the lamp and start a first class “rough house” in the dark.

Besides the galleys, “Jingo” “Bird o’ Freedom” and “Dionysius” the Club acquired an outrigger skiff “Swift” and two ordinary skiffs “Arrow” and “Heron”, two par oars, “Swan” and “Robin” and a sliding seat skiff “Sea Gull”.

Earlier on, a member F.G. Maton lent his gig “Lorne” too and in ’97 and ’98 two more gigs were purchased for £4 and £8.5s. respectively. Likewise a dinghy for £2 was added to the fleet.

The fashion for canoeing prompted the Committee to purchase a pair with sails and paddles.

One can detect here the beginnings of the change in the character of the Club. Although the annual regatta was still the “high light” of the season yet pleasure boating was in the ascendant. From the middle ‘90’s there was a gradual decline in galley rowing and racing within the Club itself, and in later years, the only rowing of this nature that took place in the upper reaches of the river, occurred at the time of the regatta when an open event for all-comers was included in the programme. The reason of course was partly financial since the cost of repair and upkeep of a boat of this description was always a source of worry, and the non-racing members were reluctant to pay subscriptions to maintain a sport in which they themselves could not take any part.

In the early and middle ‘90’s there seems to have been a strong rowing league in these waters, to which the Club belonged. Each year, Club delegates were appointed to attend the League business meetings. In ’99 however the Club would have been compelled to withdraw from this League because the galley oars were unfit to use and there were no funds to purchase new ones. A member of the Club Ted Monger, came forward and offered to supply a new set of oars on condition that the Club stayed in the League, but its life as a racing body was prolonged for only one more season, when the break with galley racing became final. By 1904 when George Cotton took over the secretaryship, the three galleys already mentioned had been disposed of.

Galley rowing was superseded by gig rowing. This, in more than one respect, was to the good, especially in the elimination of the oft recurring controversy as to the manner and choice of crews for the big events which was somewhat in evidence in the minutes of the period. Four-oared and six-oared gigs were more suited to the needs of the non-racing members, and helped considerably, by the numbers they could carry, in the promotion of a lively fellowship, especially on occasions when they were taken down stream to Fawley or Lepe, or upstream to the “Swan”. The trips to Fawley were often made with the purpose of playing the local cricket team, and on one occasion there was a match with a Hamble Cricket club. Then of course, it was only natural that members would want to introduce their lady friends to the joys of the river, and so in ’97 the Privilege Ticket was introduced, an institution that was retained until a year or so ago when the subscription was raised to an inclusive sum of 25/- per annum.

So enthusiastic did some of the members become that they were out in the gigs on every possible occasion. Mast and sails were purchased and whenever possible, oars were shipped and the boat was allowed to run before the wind to its appointed destination. There must have been some accidents coming up under the bridges for there appears in the ‘98n minutes an admonitory note urging members to take care when sailing under the bridges.

Camping too became a regular summer activity of many of the members. Here in parenthesis as it were, one may be permitted to mention the old “Annie”. Wally Green, Jim Ayling, Leon George, Alf cox and George Cotton, the original partners, bought an iron fastened ships’ boat for £40 from Itchen village. She was 27ft. long, 9ft. beam and very leaky.

Originally she had a cuddy but a cabin was built on her, thus increasing her sleeping accommodation. She was used for many seasons more or less as a ferry for camping equipment. An uncle of mine was living at Hamstead in the island and it was through this association that the Club became acquainted with the Dover at the mouth of Newtown River, as a first rate camping site. Each season a party of members would apply for the use of one of the Club gigs, which would go down at a time and sleep in a big marquee they took with them. On several occasions the party was joined by Frank Stutchbury who owned a portable harmonium. The custom was to row up to the New Inn, Shalfleet, or the Noah’s Ark, Newtown, taking the harmonium with them, with the object of a sing song in view. On one occasion the locals were invited to a concert given by the “Annie” party. Years after, in the early 20’s when I commenced camping with Bobby Bunn, I was told by the landlord of the New Inn the story of a party from Southampton who used to visit his hostelry – carrying their own harmonium.

Although the Club started as a Church organisation, it was autonomous from the beginning. Yet close and cordial relations existed between the Club and the parish. More than once, the Club supplied boating facilities on the occasion of the annual Parish Tea. For quite a time too, the secretary submitted accounts of the Club’s activities for publication in the Parish Magazine. The Clergy of the Parish were glad to be elected Presidents or Vice Presidents and to take the chair at Meetings. The Rev. Bruce Cornford rowed for the Club until he resigned and went to Portsmouth in ’94, but for many years afterwards he came back and took a prominent part in the annual regattas.

The Rev. Hoskyns resigned the parish in ’96. Others, the Revs. Jedkins, Lee, Flemming, Barton, Hibbert and Etheridge who succeeded in turn as vicars and curates of the parish, continued for many years to take the Chair at the annual meetings.

For five years preceding 1904 there was a steady decline I the affairs of the Club. In 1901 there was no regatta, owing to a lack of funds. Then to add to difficulties, the owner of the property would not, in the following year renew the lease of the ground. The L.S.W. Railway wishing to build the present bridge at the

Junction of Duke’s Road and Adelaide Road had bought up Dyers’ property, and Dyers in turn bought Yeoman’s house and the ground on which the boathouse stood. In the spring of 1903, although the Club was entitled to six months’ notice, Dyers wished us to go. On the other hand, if the Club had insisted on remaining, Dyers would have lost a season’s boating. They offered the Club £20 to quit, in lieu of notice. Walley persuaded the Committee to accept the offer, because the firm’s livelihood was involved. The Club was now in a position of having nowhere to go, and the boats were in a very poor condition. A number of the younger members, seeing no prospect of improvement emigrated to the premises of the Bitterne Hotel which in those days extended to the foreshore, and formed the present Cobden Rowing Club.

Those members who were left were faced with the problem of finding new premises. There was an offer by a Mr.Welch, owner of 132, Priory Road, to lease the end of his garden, for a rental of £4, or the alternative of going to the Priory approximately where the Club now stands. The reason why the latter choice was not acceptable to the Committee at that time is not recorded, neither can it be recalled, but it must have been a sound one for Walley Green, Charlie Gordon, George Cotton and others to vote against it. Nevertheless, one is led to cogitate on what might have happened had the Club gone then to the Priory, and to the amount of freehold the Club might have had in later years. The decision however was taken in favour of moving to 132, Priory Road, but the future outlook was so grim that at the General Meeting held in the old St. Denys Parish Hall in March, 1904, a proposition was actually considered to close down altogether and amalgamate with the newly formed Cobden Club.

The idea of seeking this way out of the difficulty was nevertheless repugnant, at least to some of those present. It was then that George Cotton who was also opposed to the suggested amalgamation, offered to take on the secretaryship if Charlie Gordon would fill the captaincy, in an “all out “effort to pull the Club round. Albert Beer was elected vice-captain and among the new committee was Bob Jordan, a ships’ carpenter, whose skill was soon made use of in the Club’s cause.

The first task of the 1904 season was the removal of the Club Headquarters. Here Dyers gave what help they could. Such boats that the Club possessed were stacked on one another, three one way and three the other on adjoining ground. The stage was uprooted; the shed pulled down and both were stacked in a barge that Dyers had lent. With considerable difficulty the dressing room, intact, was likewise put aboard and the whole lot towed downstream to the new site.

Here with even greater difficulty everything was unloaded, and those who took a hand in this water removal were dead-beat by night-fall. The boats remained where they were for many months without any sort of protection, and later when the Club was more or less in a position to use them, not one could be used except the dinghy “Harold” which had been recently acquired in exchange for the one already mentioned.

This undoubtedly was the most critical period in the whole of the Club’s history. In 1904 there were 22 members, all of whom had paid something, and the total income by subscription was £8. 3. 8d. In June, the secretary reported that

Only £3 remained in hand, just enough to pay the rent for the remainder of the year!

Chapter 3

BACK YARD BOATING

Welch’s Yard 1904 – 1909

There is an old saying “Difficulties are made to be overcome”. Difficulties there were in plenty for this new committee to face, but they worked with a will, and by April, had erected a boathouse, complete with racks, largely from wood purchased from the old Dundee Road School-room, which was then being demolished. The enthusiasm with which this was undertaken and completed, led to still further complications – this time with the Borough Engineer’s Department. The owner of the property received a communication to the effect that the new structure had not been erected in compliance with the by-laws. Indeed the Club had submitted no plans whatsoever; thinking no doubt that a building of this nature was exempt from such regulations. The penalty for breach thereof was £5 with an additional fee of £2 for every day the building proceeded. As the boathouse was already up, things looked pretty black for the Club. However, Mr. Welch, as owner of the property, interviewed one of the building inspectors who informed him that a letter of explanation and an apology would probably be the means of allowing the erection to remain. Representations were also made to Mr. Miller the ward representative on the Building Committee of the Corporation who urged that committee to take a lenient view of the case. The letter was duly sent and the matter put right but not before the Building Committee had visited the premises and ordered the removal of the dressing room to the rear of the boathouse! Whether the building itself from the river was regarded as being offensive to the eye, or whether the possibility of a fleeting glance of several males peeling off for their sport offended the susceptibilities of this committee of those days, is not recorded.

Of course access to the river from the Club was by no means so convenient as at Cobden Bridge. A short stage was erected and a hard made to a creek across the mud flats. This latter contrivance meant a saving of some little time, but even so, little could be done before half tide.

The hard work of the early part of the season followed by organised Club trips down stream, and by summer camps. In those days one had no need to go any further than Hamble Common for an excellent camping site. Also there was a landing stage with a hard running from it, kept in good repair. This site was often used by Club members till even after World War 1. Access by the general public soon spoiled Hamble for camping and younger members have had to look to Brownwich on the other side of Hamble River mouth and elsewhere.

The season of 1905 opened with the Annual General Meeting, at which the secretary was able to report a small balance on the year’s working, which was regarded as very satisfactory. Two events at the meeting are worthy of note. Walley Green who for domestic reasons had for some long time not been able to give so much attention to Club affair as he would have wished, now felt himself free to take a more active part in things, and in consequence allowed his name to go forward for the Vice Presidency. Walley had no intention of being just a figurehead and once more threw himself heart and soul into the organisation.

The other event was the presentation to Walley by the Rev. Judkins, the President, of the Hoskyns Challenge Cup mounted on an ebony plinth, made by Mr. A.E.Beer. Albert was a man of many parts, - engraver, sign-writer, light engineer, carpenter and joiner – these were but some of the roles he could very efficiently fulfil. Of the first mentioned skill he was particularly proud, but he exercised them all in turn to the Club’s advantage right up until his death. My first recollection of Albert Beer are those of a small boy watching a Club Regatta. Albert was the starter and I marvelled at the way he managed to line up the crafts ready for the race. Black looks or angry gestures from a would-be flyer off the mark could not remove the benign smile from his countenance, but he always had his way. Those of us who were privileged to work and play with him realised that the Club was his very life outside of his home and business. Shall we ever forget his hearty laugh, his topical recitations on social occasions when his colleagues became the but of his irrepressible but kindly humour, his benignly superior surveillance of amateurish attempts to do a job of work and his eagerness to demonstrate the way it should be done, his unbounded excitement when fishing – “All the way up!” he would shout as he hauled in his line – and the good natured banter between himself and Tim Long whenever they came within earshot of one another. For many years he officiated at Club whist drives and dances and so made a wide circle of friends who loved his general disposition. He was a friend to all and an enemy to none.

The feature of this period of Club history is the part it took in the Annual Water Carnival. It had been the custom for the riverside residents to organise an event of this nature during the summer and the Club was invited to join in. The boats were gaily decorated and then towed up and down the river on Carnival Night, when prizes were offered for the best show. Originally, individual members were given permission to enter boats and in 1905 the first time of entering, a second prize was won. Later on the Club entered boats. I well remember the old “Harold” one year being converted into a cane and paper lighthouse whilst on one occasion the big gig was a Royal Coach surmounted by a crown. Cane was bent the required shape and sprung into the knees. This was covered with a wide band of stiff white paper, and then crepe paper flowers were wired on to this background. Chinese lanterns and fairy lights similar but a little larger than ordinary meat paste jars and carrying night lights, were suitably suspended round the gunwhale and among the decorations, and as dusk fell, these were all lit up. The whole thing was very effective and provided much fun for hundreds of onlookers from the bridge and along the river side. Wives and lady friends of members all helped with the decorations and I remember as though it were yesterday the industry and skill of my mother and aunt in making flowers that nature knew nothing

About but which were nevertheless pleasing to the eye when massed according to some master design. These occasions afforded a chance for the display of artistic skill, ingenuity, and originality. That the Club pulled off so many first and second prizes during the time it entered these events, showed that Club competitors were not lacking in these attributes. The Club took part in the Annual Carnival up till just before the First World War. Members also entered the Town Carnival at the Royal Pier on some occasions but after 1908, when, owing to faulty towing arrangements, our boats were not towed back to Cobden Bridge until early the following morning, the Club took no further part in this event. This incidentally is the only occasion that George Cotton in his long service as secretary ever wrote a letter to the “Echo”. In this he protested, On behalf of the Club, in no uncertain terms, against the behaviour of the Town Water Carnival Committee in disregarding the comfort of competitors from the Itchen who were kept afloat at a mooring off the Pier, for over five hours.

A number of events recorded between 1905 and 1908 are of significance and interest to us today. For instance in 1905 a gig was bought for 312.10s., the money being raised by £1 shares. Then in the following year it was proposed that a sail should be purchased for her. Doughty opposition to this came from Norman Coombs, son of a well know Cross Channel skipper, who objected to the Club being in any way identified with sailing! Norman and brother Ralph who were later joined by Marcus were three staunch members for many years. Then again there is a minute to the effect that Sunday boating would be permitted after Church hours, another to the effect that the Club had been insured for £100 at a premium of 5/- and yet another that a member had been requested to pay 2/6 as half cost of a new dinghy oar!

The Annual Competition for the Hoskyns Cup underwent a number of changes. First, it was simplified to a knock-out tournament for all comers, thus establishing the competition in the form it exists today. It was then modified by the formation of a Skiff league which was subsequently divided into junior and senior sections. For several reasons the committee persevered with the Skiff Leagues but eventually the straight K.O. tournament was resumed.

As the months passed by, from those very unpropitious beginnings the combined effects of real enthusiasm, hard work and diligent leadership begun to tell favourably on the affairs of the Club. In the short space of four years, the question “How can we survive?” was superseded by “How can we expand?”

The thought now uppermost in the minds of the committee was centred round the firm establishment of headquarters standing on property owned by the Club or taken out on a long lease. Point was given to this laudable desire by the fact that the ownership of 132, Priory Road, had changed hands, and the future of the Club there, once more had become uncertain.

One of the possibilities that commended itself to members was still the purchase or lease of ground on which the old Priory stood, and in 1907, an approach was made to the joint owners with this end in view. Albert Beer and George Cotton were authorised to enter into negotiations with a Mr. Carter. These proved abortive since the owners were not willing to see, but would only lease a portion for £7.10s. per annum, a figure that was regarded but the committee as being excessive.

Then came the information with spring of 1908 that 216 Priory Road, was for sale. George Cotton offered to guarantee the money for the purchase of sufficient ground for the Club requirements if obtainable, and if the Committee agreed. It was considered that shares to the necessary amount might be raised among members, so with other members of the Committee he went to the sale, but was unsuccessful in securing it at 3240, the maximum he was prepared to bid. The Committee continued to persevere in their endeavour to obtain what they required, and eventually the new owner expressed his willingness to let a 40ft. frontage to the river for 3 years at £5 per annum. This was reported to the Committee meeting of March 9th, 1909, and Norman Coombs proposed that the Club should move to the Priory by quarter day, March 26th. Meanwhile the new owner of 132 Priory Road, Mr. Udall afterwards Councillor Udall, had agreed to renew our tenancy at the same rate. This was now declined with thanks and the offer of the Priory tenancy accepted. Once more everything was uprooted and transported by water to the new site, but this time there was a feeling that this was a move for the better and to greater security and stability. For a cost of £9 the shed was reconstructed and covered with galvanised iron and a “lean-to” added. This time plans were drawn of shed and stage and submitted to the appropriate Corporation officials.

How justified these ‘pioneers’ were, can be judged only in the light of the present position of the Club.

About this time fate threatened to lay her heavy hand on the Club in another direction but finally relented. Charlie Gordon was ordered away from the town. With great regret the Committee accepted his resignation of the captaincy and recorded their “due appreciation of his valuable services”. Very fortunately for the Club Charlie’s services elsewhere on behalf of the Ordnance Survey were not required, and the same Committee meeting that voted the move to the Priory, “requested Mr. Gordon to withdraw his resignation and resume the Captaincy of the Club”. The elected officers for that year as recorded were:-

President Rev. L. S. Etheridge

Vice Presidents Lord Swaythling

Arthur Lee Esq. M.P.

Rev. Bruce Cornford M.A.

Tankerville Chamberlayne Esq. M.P.

W.E. Green Esq.

F.C. Fear Esq.

Councillor A.H.Willey

Captain Mr. C.H.Gordon

Vice Captain Mr. R. Jordon

Committee Mr. A.E.Beer E.Butt

R.Coombes D.Martell

J.Grant F.Keen

E.Brock E.Hawkins

Hon.Sec. Mr.G.Cotton

Assistant Hon. Sec. Mr.N.Coombes

Auditors Mr.A.E.Beer

Mr.G.Russell

Chapter 4

The Present Site

Extract from minutes:-

“Committee meeting held April 6th 1909.

The first regular meeting of the committee for the season was held on this date at the new club headquarters when there were present Messrs. Green (Chairman), Gordon, N. and R.Coombes, Butt, Beer, Martell, Keen, Hawkins, Jordon and Cotton……..”

Yes, just one more routine business meeting recorded in much the usual manner of reporting most business meetings. But there is an important fact set down and I am confident that the writer could hardly have realised, that the significance of his own words would become all the more pronounced as the hand of time discoloured the ink and faded the paper on which they are written. The first committee meeting on the new site marked the commencement of that period of the Club’s history when it blossoms forth as a prosperous community independent of outside help, but relying always on the esprit de corps or its membership which always stood as now twenty years old, but the long uphill track to solvency and stability was now gradually being left behind.

Extension and improvement of premises and acquisition of new boats as fund would allow, became the chief consideration and the next twenty years saw the establishment of the Club as we know it today. As the story unfolds, one can detect a constantly recurring theme. First a report from the Secretary that so much money is on hand, and this is almost invariably followed by discussion on ways of spending it in the best interests of the Club. At one time boats would be purchased, at another, it would be capitalised in the premises. From this time right up to the present day the Club has financially gone forward.

The old dressing room was once more erected and was the scene of this Committee meeting, on April 6th, 1909 already referred to and the first task undertaken was the raising of the level of the ground to avoid being flooded at highest Spring tides. Walley Green prepared a plan for the boathouse which was duly submitted to the Works Committee and rejected because the necessary distance of 15 feet from either boundary was not shown on the plan, neither was it shown 30 feet from the adjoining building! Albert Beer was however on good terms with the building inspector of the day and between them these plans were amended and finally passed. Our boundary on the bridge side was moved 10 feet up-stream and Mr.Doxat who owned a boathouse and slipway, with the consent of the owner of the ground, took over the ground we vacated. I can just remember the site after the boathouse was up. The row of houses from Priory Road, as far as Mansbridge’s but not including that pair, were up, but there was little else from the bridge to the cottage except green fields and hedgerows. The original river bank existed with a hedge running along it. Also, many large stones from the old

Priory were visible among the grass and along the water front, which finally found their last resting place in the footings of the jetty that was eventually thrown out. Doxat’s boathouse complete with slipway adjoining the Club, housed his own boats, one a very nice cabin cruiser I remember. The whole constituted an ideal riverside setting, facing as it did the meadows which were left in perpetuity to the Town by the late Lord Swaythling. Indeed, the first impulse was to hold a garden party on the site as which the Regatta Prizes were to be presented. Dancing on the lawn was suggested, and as dusk fell it was planned to surround the scene with Chinese lanterns. Unfortunately the Clerk of the weather intervened and the project had to be abandoned in favour of a more orthodox prize giving and tea in the Parish Hall.

The June Committee meeting decided to purchase a new “cock and hen” on the strength of a probable balance of £10 on the year’s working and behind this purchase is an amusing story of Walley as a self-confessed “snooper”. Walley was well acquainted with the Dyers and indeed for many years kept his boat at their yard. About this time the brothers were complaining that the cock and hens they were building were always developing a bulge between the gunwales at the passenger’s thwart. Therefore one fine evening, so the story goes, Walley invited them to go for a row with him, and together they explored the creeks and bulrushes each side of the river up above the Oaks. What they saw has never been revealed but for ever after, Dyers cock and hens were built with room to seat two passengers instead of one in the stern. Hence the Committee of S.D.A.R.C. resolved to purchase a cock and hen to such specifications, which, when delivered, was euphemistically christened “Dove”. A well made cedar built boat, she was very popular as indeed she still is today, but so keen was the competition to secure her for the row up the river with their girlfriends that it was deemed necessary to insist “that no privilege holder will be entitled to use the new cock and hen oftener than once per week after 6p.m. or Saturday afternoon”. Towards the close of that same year, three skiffs, afterwards named “Swift” “Swallow” and “Martin” were ordered at a cost of £9 each, and delivered in the spring of the following years.

The same season of 1910 marks another milestone in our story, for, apart from the fact that the Club was now come of age, it was given the opportunity of purchasing the ground on which it stood, which the Committee were not slow to consider. Mr. Carter, the ground landlord, intimated his willingness to see for £100. The October meeting thought the price excessive, but that if the ground could be secured the future of the Club would be assured. It must be realised that £100 at that time was no mean sum of money and the negotiations and domestic planning to raise this sum reflected courage as well as foresight on the part of those immediately concerned. The Gordon brothers (Charlie and Alf), proposed that, provided a suitable financial scheme could be brought forward, they should go ahead. The Secretary pointed out that the Club income had increased from £20 to £50 a year since the removal of the headquarters to the present site and that we could well afford to pay £20 down and £20 a year for 4 years afterwards to complete the purchase and he was authorised to make the offer.

In the meantime Carter had sold the whole plot to Messrs. Clark and Son of Bitterne Park but unfortunately the latter were willing to see the Club plot less a

Strip off the back necessary for building two houses in continuation of the existing terrace, for £90. This gave the Club the present site, a 40 ft. frontage with a depth of 85 ft. So it was that purchase was made by allocation of 320 from Club funds and 310 shares volunteered by members.

The minutes of October 17th conclude this:-

“The following were elected to serve as Trustees, and to hold on behalf of the Club, the ground.

George Frederick Henry Cotton

Walter Edwin Green

Charles Henry Gordon

Needless to say the legal business was in the expert hands of Arch Ewing who was warmly thanked for his voluntary help which on this occasion and all subsequent ones he so generously accorded. Thus the hopes and aspirations of members for nearly twenty years had been realised.

Here for a moment I must speak of the Club from another angle. My earliest childhood recollections are closely associated with the club, and as I grew up, I accepted, subconsciously no doubt, that it loomed large in our home life. Life practically revolved round the Club and to say that it was my father’s sole hobby is but a half truth; it was his life. Furthermore, as circumstances allowed, he was supported by mother in the social activities particularly the whist drives and dances. When I read the minutes for over 40 years of Committee meetings all in the same handwriting, it is with deep pride tempered with respect for his intense dislike of publicity, that I write of the part played by the write of those minutes. But facts are facts and must be recorded as such. The steady progress that the Club had made towards independence and solvency was due in no small measure to the constant care my father took in husbanding the finances of the club. This, together with his constant perseverance in helping to do up the boats, and his work on the social side was recognised by the presentation at the 22nd. A.G.M. in 1911, of a handsome roll top desk from the members. This token of esteem which he treasures and uses to this day bears the inscription – *Presented to Mr. George Cotton by the members of St. Deny’s Amateur Rowing Club in appreciation of his services as Hon. Sec. during the last 7 years, he, having by his example of Comradeship, energy and Tact raised it from “Low Ebb” to “Flood Tide”.*

March 15th, 1911.

He had been secretary just 7 years, long enough for many people, but it represented just one six of his total time in that office.

The seasons of 1910 and 1911 were prosperous socially as well as financially. The former, the year of the Coronation of George V was charged with the Coronation spirit and in the carnival of that year the big gig was decorated as a huge crown. The regatta was held, Bruce Cornford coming up from Portsmouth to act as a judge, and Ern Dowding won the Skiff competition. In the fall of the year a new double sculler was ordered from Dyer’s. She was delivered in the following spring and christened “Mavis”, and of all the boats the Club has ever possessed, I don’t suppose there has been a more popular one for family picnic up the river.

I well remember the Saturday afternoon she was rowed round from Dyer’s to the Club. Two other boats came into the Club’s possession about that time, “Viking” and another “Harold”. The latter was an American-built dinghy, very narrow and somewhat crank and the former, a centre-board dinghy. The mention of a boat immediately conjures up recollections of individual members whose names for one reason or another became attached to that boat, and this is true of “Mavis” and those dinghies. The red sailed “Viking” was a favourite of the late Ken Sampson’s when he came home from sea. Ken came from a sea faring family and later was joined by his brothers Jack and Hugh, in the Club. Ken, in his single days was known to return from a voyage of several months duration and make straight for the Club, where he would find a job to do. Whilst away on one of these voyages he made a mainsail for “Viking”. He was trained in “sail” and never happier than when at the helm of a sailing craft large or small. His fiancée enjoyed it too, and often accompanied him. Later, after they were married and he became a pilot in local waters stationed at “Seaview”, he owned his own dinghy and it was not an uncommon occurrence for him to come ashore from the pilot cutter at Seaview Pier and get straight aboard his dinghy which his wife had all ready and waiting for him. Then one is reminded of Bob Bunn of the early twenties who, with only his dog often went down the river in “Viking”. It was nothing for him to start off at 4 a.m. before daylight, in the most unpromising weather. “Harold” too later on became an attachment of Donald Johnson and his dog. Donald tried to make “Harold” sail, but I fear without much success. Then again, whilst others will no doubt have similar but different associations of ideas attached to men and boats, yet in my mind will always be linked to “Mavis” and the Rodda family. George Rodda, recently retired from H.M Waterguard, and a member of many years standing, used regularly in his younger days to take his wife and family for picnics up the river and when he returned, “Mavis”, and for that matter any other boat he handled was given terrific clean out such that it rarely got from others except perhaps before a social. Georg’s family have now grown up, and Vernon his son is a member, and for the last three seasons he and the writer hold the distinction of having chosen the best weekend in August for our sailing holiday!

A number of happenings though minor, are worthy of report in the year 1911. The summer was I remember a blazing hot one, and there were many Saturday afternoon Club trips, in some of which, I was allowed to join. On occasion I was allowed to “tickle” the water with the bow oar of “Saxon” the six-oared gig that was generally taken down. Was I proud of that privilege? Then again, in the Regatta the Committee decided it was high time that a veterans’ race, was held! The incision of another notch in the score of Time, raising perhaps a cynical smile, is best related in the words of the minutes for May 1911 “The secretary mentioned that a claim for income tax on the annual value of the Club ground, amounting to 4/11 had been made, and he had been at some trouble to contest it, but that the Surveyor of Taxes had explained that exemption could not be claimed by a club but only by individuals. The Committee decided that as the amount was small it would save trouble to pay.”

Throughout the season improvements were being made to the premises, a trolley was built and lines laid down the stage, a shrubbery was raised at the back of the boathouse and land was reclaimed to the line of the old wall.

Taking it by and large, the Club had just cause to be very satisfied with its position. Apart from the members’ subscription, a regular income was now coming in from whist drives and dances, held each year during the winter months, in the Parish Hall. The hall would be booked in advance for a series of these drives and would be run by a sub-committee. A stalwart of those drives which concluded with a dance, was Charlie Andrews of the “Telephones” who for many seasons was the Club’s honorary pianist.

Then last, but certainly not least, in the affairs of that year, was the October Committee meeting, when we hear of the Secretary’s appeal to consider the question of building a new boathouse, as the utmost limit of accommodation had been reached with the purchase of “Mavis”. The debt on the ground was being comfortably met and he asked that as soon as that loan had been paid off, a new one be raised to finance the construction of a shed sufficiently large for the purpose of both club-room and boathouse. From this point till 1914 the story of the Club centres round the construction of the present premises. Early in 1912 members were invited to submit plans for the Committee’s consideration. Three plans were submitted, Messrs. Macintosh, Walter Sincock and Albert Beer. Macintosh submitted a plan showing a building 40 ft. x 25 ft. with 10 ft. added on the shore end for club room and lavatory at an approximate cost of £175, to be constructed of iron. Sincock estimated for a similar building of 243 gauge iron for £95, or if brick with two storeys would cost £200. Albert’s plan was that of a boathouse with clubroom shown over the front overlooking the river. A sub-committee was appointed to consider these plans, and eventually favouring Albert’s invited Sincock to tender, for which he did at a cost of £156. This was considered to be in excess of what the Club could afford and so the matter for the moment was dropped, it being decided to wait until the debt on the ground was fully paid off. It is worthy of note that at this stage of the proceedings, the erection of a brick building was not seriously entertained, although Sincock’s estimates were regarded as very moderate. The decision to “hasten slowly” was a very wise one as it gave opportunity for mature consideration of the whole question. Meanwhile the ground loan had been paid off, the announcement of which gave great satisfaction to all who attended the 24th Annual General Meeting in 1913. The subject was again reopened at the first Committee meeting of the season, when it was proposed that Mr. Beer’s plan should be adopted, and a decision taken to test the response of the general membership to an invitation to subscribe to a loan for the project. It was pointed out at the next meeting however that money could not be raised on the security of an iron building, but only on a brick one. The advantage of a brick building with a large room overhead which would be the source of a steady income to the Club were also stressed. The finances of the Club were again subjected to close scrutiny – if that were possible – and no doubt could be cast upon the Club’s ability to make £50 a year profit. Also, sufficient funds could be raised from members by loan at 5%. The tin shed proposal was doomed, and in its place was one for the construction of a brock boathouse and clubroom. Albert, who had suffered the mortification of seeing his plan set aside was soon before the Committee again with new ones. These were adopted and Walt Sincock invited to tender. He offered the alternative of a brick building 51 ft. x 2 ft., with roof match-boarded and covered with asbestos tiles for £250, or the same with

Corrugated iron roof (not match-boarded) for £230. If in the latter case the balcony had no roof then the charge would be £5 less.

The first plan with minor modifications which included a stairway at the back and an extra steel joist in the centre of the building, was adopted. To meet the cost, a loan of £200 was raised. As the suggested repayment of £30 per annum included interest augmented by a possible £20 per year from whist drives, would from 7/6 to 10/-. The plans were duly passed by the Corporation Building Committee and in the fall of the year the old boat-house was demolished the iron being the building was in an advanced state, and on the 6th January, 1914, a special meeting was held in the boathouse when the Secretary announced the payment of £250 plus £10.9.9. extras. But this did not quite cover the expenses incurred by Mr. Sincock who, in his anxiety to do his best for the Club, cut the estimates as finely as possible, with the result that he was some £13 down. This was acknowledged by the Club and paid off at a later date.

In May Mr. J. R. Campbell of Thornhill Park, formally opened the Club from the balcony amid much enthusiasm from the members and friends present. The ceremony was followed by a ‘highly successful tea and a most enjoyable evening of singing and dancing’.

This was a proud moment for those who not only had the energy and foresight but the courage to go through with the plan, and advance the loan, and one might pause for a moment to recall the names of those who at that time formed the Committee. Besides Walley Green, now well established as Chairman of the Committee, Albert Beer and George Cotton as Sec. there were several others who had now been identified with the Club for many years, for example, Norman Coombs, assistant Hon. Sec. and his brother Ralph, Charlie Gordon, Captain for 12 years and brothers Reg. and Alf. Then there were Alf Brunt and Bob Jordon who brought their skills to play in the general upkeep of boats and premises, Frank Grant and Stan. De grouchy, Stanley Nineham and ‘Ticker’ Butt the mandolin player.

An every growing feature of the club was its social life. This not only contributed towards good fellowship but also sound finances and not a little is owed to members of that Committee who for seasons past had organised whist drives and dances already referred to during the winter months in the Parish Hall, which were so successful and were proving a source of income apart from members’ subscriptions. Charlie Andrews continued to play the piano for the Club dances and whist drives, and after the war, when the Club ran its affairs in its own Hall, it was a source of satisfaction to all that Charlie was still available to play for us in those happier days. By now, these functions, like the Club itself had become well established and interwoven into the general pattern of the latter’s existence, The Records of Club affairs outside the construction of the new premises are not entirely devoid of interest. No doubt most folk passing up and down the river as we do, have at some time or other landed at Hamble Cliff using the hard there in front of the boathouse and perhaps have been glad to light

a fire and boil water for a cup of tea which was drawn from the covered-n water supply a little way up the beach towards the hospital. Both hardway and water supply were provided by the owner of the property Mrs. Eliot Yorke, a patron of the Club in its early days. She lived in that large house on the cliff which is now exposed to view from the water but which at one time was hidden by a copse on the cliff edge. Her action inspired a letter of thanks from the Committee “for such great convenience to members of the Club camping and picnicking there.” It is to be deplored that the superstructure with its apt inscription on the stonework at the back “Ho everyone that thirsteth come ye to the waters and drink” is a bad state of repair with the “porch” roof missing and the wall crumbling to pieces.

Another record at the same time (1912) refers to question of the conduct of whistdrives, and Arch Ewing was asked to approach the Chief Constable’s reply was as follows:-

1. Prizes must not be provided out of the ticket money or entrance fees.
2. Partners must not be changed after each hand.
3. The conditions do not apply to clubs where non-members are not invited.

As partners ‘drives were not proving very popular, steps were taken to comply with the law so that progressive whist drives could be held. A Social Branch of St. Denys A.R.C. was therefore formed to which anyone seemingly might belong who paid his two pence membership fee. The original members of the Social Branch are duly recorded in the Minutes, nut one is led to speculate why there is no further reference anywhere to this Branch.

Chapter 5

First World War and the Twenties

An abiding recollection of my boyhood days (I was twelve at the time) was a gig trip to Calshot on that memorable Saturday in 1914 just before the war was declared when the Fleet was assembled at Spithead for review. It was a brilliant summer’s day and a feature of this event apart from its association with the imminence of war was the presence at the review of a squadron of water planes (as they were then called) manned by the recently formed R.N.A.S. Away in the distance could be seen manoeuvring clumsily, a dirigible, looking like a ‘Churchill’ cigar, and as evening approached and the tide turned these planes returned

to Calshot much to my delight, and I had a ‘grand stand’ view of their landing taxi-ing to the foreshore at the foot of the Castle, there to be met by a squadron of ratings who had trundled trollies to the water ready to receive their respective craft and haul them up the shingle and on to the Castle precincts. The pilots were pick backed ashore where they foregathered to discuss their afternoon’s experience. Boy like, I approached with bated breath and true hero worship in my heart, these gods of the air, only to find that from a lurid description of the soreness of his nether regions, which one of them volunteered to the group, they were but ordinary mortals of the King’s Navee! Reflecting since on the incident, I realise that I must have witnessed in this little group pf men and machines, the birth of our Country’s might in the air with the attendant use of Calshot as a sea plane base for the first time in its long history.

Another of these recollections is that of a row I had down the river with my parents one peaceful August evening just after the declaration of war. We went down to the Dockhead and on our return observed two khaki figures standing at ease with fixed bayonets under the Netley railway bridge. There they stood, one at each end, on the cobbles as if on a parade ground, reminding us of the unpleasant fact that we were actually at war with Germany. The little headroom under the girder left to these modern Horatios at the top of a neap tide naturally led to speculation as to what the military procedure would be in the case of a high spring tide!

As the fear of sabotage subsided, these sentries were withdrawn, but directly the port was taken over by the military, passage of all civilian craft below the Floating Bridge was prohibited. This was the first repercussion, and second was the cancellation of the regatta. The very first of our members to suffer was Ken Sampson. He had taken a boat to Hamburg and was unfortunate enough to be in the port when war was declared. It was therefore his bitter fate to be interned for the whole of the war in Ruhleben. One can imagine the feelings of such an active personality as Ken under such confinement.

For several months however, things at home went on more or less normally. The first Hall Subcommittee formed for letting the hall began to do business from the start. The Club itself ran whist drives and dances, in support of war charities, and it was not until 1916 that the question of suspending the club’s activities was seriously considered.

Already many members had joined up and had been made honorary members, but to offset this, our membership was being steadily maintained by the election of personnel of His Majesty’s Forces stationed in the locality. For instance twelve members of the Sergeants’ Mess of the Remount Depot at Swaythling joined in a body. One of these, C.S.M. Hardwick retained his membership after the war and remained with the club for many years. It became clear to those responsible that the Club was affording recreation to those needing it besides well-earned relaxation to our honorary members they came home on leave. This consideration, coupled with the fact that the Club was still saddled with a substantial part of the building loan, prompted the Committee to carry on. It is a fact worthy of note that, although the war disrupted the corporate life of the

Club as indeed it did everything else, yet there were far reaching compensations on the financial side. Whilst expenditure particularly on the boats was naturally curtailed to a minimum, as there was no down river boating, hall takings were gradually increasing, as its amenities came to be known. Then too, a fortnightly series of Club dances was maintained which not only contributed to its social life, but also to its coffers.

By the beginning of 1917 the deficit of £273 had been reduced to £123. The following year it fell to 361, and by the time the Annual Report was read in 1918 it was practically extinguished.

It is interesting to recall that among our first clients was the co-op Women’s Guild which commenced its long and cordial association with the Club in 1916.

The dreary months of war had succeeded one another with monotonous regularity and unrelieved gloom and as the younger age groups were swallowed up ion the holocaust, the older men were called up to fill the ranks. Charlie Gordon was called to the colours and he saw service first in France and then in Russia where the extreme climate undermined his health and he was invalided out. His brother Alf, Norman Coombes, Frank Gosselin, J. Anglin, Ted Butt all older Committee men were called up. The scythe of war however, passed lightly over the Club, but it nevertheless had to mourn the loss of Athel Orme who was lost at sea. He was a keen oarsman and an excellent swimmer and his name is perpetuated in the “Athel Orme Shield” in the possession of Southampton Amateur Swimming Club. This shield is presented annually to the champion 100 yds Free Style swimmer.

Two years later the war veteran were welcomed back, and hostilities now over, the Secretary was able to write in a much more optimistic vein in his annual report, mentioning some of the hopes and aspirations of the future, including the purchase of new boats and the construction of a new stage.

The latter was commenced that summer. Reference has already been made to the Remount Depot at Swaythling which the military authorities had organised for the purpose of maintaining a steady supply of horses and mules to the front line. These were put aboard converted transports and it was from a sale of stabling at the Docks that a goodly supply of suitable timber was purchased and the Committee, after turning down estimates, themselves undertook to do the job. It was finished in the fall of the year, and the fact that new decking was laid down on the original bearers and braces just before the Second World War, is ample testimony to the work of these “mudlarks”. Again, much of the timber forming that stage despite alternate exposure to air and water for twenty years was found to be sound. True enough it had been well preserved with liberal dressings of tar during that time. Light ion lines, were added the following spring and this job too, was completed to last.

The promise to purchase new boats was fulfilled, for an order for three cock and hens was placed with Fanner. The Cupid, Venus and Adonis were built for the then considerably inflated price of £96.10. In 1950, these boats were disposed of for £50!

A four oared gig (Dane) was acquired for £13.10., and “Redwing” a Thames built double sculler was purchased for - £2.10. The latter had been lying neglected in the Salmon Pool and the Club made the offer which was accepted. She too has now been disposed of after a quarter of a century in commission under the Club ensign. Because of her length, she was very fast and on more than one occasion was entered in local regattas in open double sculler events and of course left the rest of the competitors in the race miles behind!

The same year saw the installation of Mr.Beer as treasurer of the Club, a position to be held right up until the time of his death in 1931. The Club’s finances were now assuming substantial proportions and it was deemed advisable to separate the offices of Secretary and Treasurer with a Club banking account. Personal friendships as I have elsewhere stated have time after time grown up round the old Club, and I know George Cotton looks back with abiding pleasure and gratitude on the recollections of such good friends and companions as Norman Coombs who was Assistant Sec. for so long, and later Albert Beer our Treasurer, with whom he naturally had close associations in the transaction of Club business.

Whilst the older members who had been called to the Colours were returning to civil life, once more to resume their club activities, a younger generation was also joining the Club’s ranks, in such numbers as to create really keen competition for the few vacancies that occurred at the end of each season. This keenness to join the Club, signifying as it did the esteem with which it was held outside, to disappoint obtained for several seasons, and each April the Committee, very reluctantly had to disappoint many who would no doubt have made excellent members. For example in 1924, after the addition of “Norseman” and “Venetia” to our fleet it was deemed advisable to increase the membership from 110 to 120. That year there were 50 applicants for 16 vacancies created by resignation, and the 10 new ones. Some seasons there were no vacancies at all, as happened in 1920 when the writer became eligible to join. Having been solemnly assured that chances of becoming a member were very remote, he had resigned himself to this fate, but you can picture his surprise and delight when, after the Committee meeting at which applications were considered he was informed of his election. It transpired that Tim Long persuaded a number of the younger blades including Len Petty, Reg. Bean, Bob Dunn, Bill Snowdon and Don Johnson to sign a petition to the Committee on my behalf, requesting that in recognition of the services of the Secretary, an exception might be made in favour of the election of his son. One recalls with humble pride and gratitude that the Committee readily assented to this request.

The season of 1920 was made the occasion of one of those bursts of colourful pageantry which became almost tradition whilst the late Bishop Lovett was Rector of St. Mary’s. He and his talented daughters would write a play round some local historic theme, and the success of the show would depend on the deployment of hundreds of people in effective crowd scenes set in appropriate natural surroundings. On this occasion the theme was Tercentenary of the Pilgrim Fathers’ departure from the shores of England. The ‘stage’ was that stretch of Western Esplanade between the ‘Red Funnel Offices and Cuckoo Lane, up

to which, the tide then rose. The road each end was blocked off with high terraces erected for the audience. The story centred around the arrival in 1620 of the “Mayflower” at Southampton, and her subsequent stay in the port. The Club was asked to help, with other, to man the boats. Volunteers were asked for and were forthcoming in sufficient numbers to crew for the whole time the Pageant was on. Our first task was to refurbish our knowledge of boat drill and so we placed ourselves under no lesser authority than Ken Sampson who got us out on the river in the Saxon and put us through our paces. The great day of the dress rehearsal came and when we donned the garb set aside for us appropriate to our part as boatmen of Hampton, we looked as tough a set of cut-throats as had ever walked Bugle Street, and indeed I am convinced that the fair Priscilla and her retinue of Puritans thought the same about us when we arrived on the Pier pontoon to take over our boats. The latter were old life boats from the torpedoed, “Margaret of Scotland”, which had been lying in the river for some months with the oars chained to the thwarts. These oars were found to be very warped and when “tossed” looked as straight as Robin Hood’s bows and were just as useful for rowing. Our task was to row the Pilgrim Fathers from an imaginary “Mayflower” moored out of sight of the audience beyond the Pier head, to the foot of the Esplanade where we were to land. We felt very self-conscious having to perform to crowds of people on the Pier itself, and to add to the discomfiture of our first evening, one of our number rowing with a sprung oar, broke it and tuned a complete somersault over the thwart, much to the amusement of the onlookers. Having competed our trip and made fast our own craft we were instructed to come ashore ourselves and mingle with townspeople in the mediaeval street scene above, the only restriction placed upon us being that of subdued conversation. Using our own initiative to add a spice of realism we made our way a few paces up the street to a drinking booth, where in the saltiest style we sprawled ourselves across the forms and ordered our tankards of ale from mine host and his daughter. He was not to be outdone in this byplay however for, from a huge cask behind him he produced no tawny make believe, but filled our tankards with long draughts of the real thing! So surprised was one individual that he forgot the part he was playing and his remarks ringing across the arena brought forth fulminating recriminations from the stage manager!

The show went on for several nights and our fair passengers, who at first were a little alarmed, came to enjoy their regular evening trips round the Pier head and were very sorry when all was over. The whole affair like its predecessors had engaged the attention of many organisations in the Town of which the Club was one. A panoramic photo of those taking part is still extant and was presented to the club by Norman Coombs, when to everyone’s great regret he bade farewell to the Club to take up a post in Mombasa.

As we have seen, the early ‘twenties’ was characterised by the influx of a number of keen young men who by their enthusiasm and diligence on behalf of the Club, soon became earmarked as committee men to support those who by now could record very many years of service in that capacity. It must not be inferred that the seniors were admitting they had reached the veteran stage, for this was far from the case. Walley, Charlie Gordon, and George Cotton in spite of a serious illness during the war, still rowed well, and on one occasion at least got together

a gig crew of “olduns” which beat the “youngsters” by several lengths. Nor was this all, for Walley, in his 50th year, went in for the cup – and won it!

Nevertheless they were glad for the young members to organise rowing competitions within the Club whilst they gave their attention to other things. In this junior group was a gymnast, Bill Snowdon, and with his leadership a gym section of the Club was formed. During the winter months the group met once a week to have the gloves on with one another, knock the stuffing out of a punch ball, or do running somersaults over groups of chairs. Then at the end of the season they rounded off their programme with a Club dinner. The dinners were more in the nature of a get-together and were made possible by the wives of the Committee undertaking to cook some portion or other of the meal which was hastily transported to the Club before it got too cold. Mrs. Green was a prime helper in these affairs. This early attempt at winter Keep-Fit lasted for several seasons and added much to the social life of the Club. But these fellows were keen rowing men as well, and season by season, organised a sports programme including, pair oar, double sculling and gig races, as well as the skiff championship. Regular challenges to gig races crossed the river from Cobden to St. Denys and vice versa, and keen but friendly rivalry was matched only by the hard races we had which resulted generally in our favour. In 1950 this race with Cobden was revived and it is to be hoped that it will be the forerunner of many more.

Another feature of this epoch was the dancing boom in which the Club shared. Through the ‘twenties’, fortnightly Club dances were run which were always well supported not only by friends but by the members themselves. That these dances should be run so often and for so many seasons, is almost phenomenal. Times like Christmas and Easter were often the occasion of fancy dress dances.

What has been written of the dances was no less true of the monthly whist drives followed by a dance. For many seasons the Club commanded a following of keen whist players who enjoyed their evenings whist under Albert Beer who invariably acted as M.C. Needless to say the proceeds of these functions added grist to the mill and contributed considerably at first to the reduction of the debt incurred with the kitchen extension and in the long run to the strong position the Club is in to-day. There was however, a certain criticism that the social side was boosted at the expense of the rowing, but in his 34th Report the Secretary wrote

“….It has been said that we are a rowing club, and not a social club. We agree. We are a boat club 1st, 2nd, 3rd and always and the social side, that is, the dancing and whist drives must always take second place to the boating. But these things almost entirely take place in the winter, when boating is hibernating, and moreover serves, not only the purpose of bringing members together and their friends in friendly intercourse, but also by means of the additional income, enables more money to be spent on the boating than would be possible if only members’ subscriptions were available. In one exceptional recent year £200 was spent for purely club purposes…..practically three years’ subscriptions in one year and it was only possible because of the hall and social efforts…..”

Yet another and perhaps the most important aspect of these years was the virtual completion of the main constructional work. A year or two’s running of the new premises were enough to convince the Committee of the tremendous advantage it would be, if proper dressing room and kitchen accommodation were added to the hall, besides giving us the use of several extra square feet of room below, and so it was that, once more, suggestions were invited and plans drawn. In 1923 there were two plans put forward, the first to extend the building across the rear of the present premises to a depth of about 14 ft. which was the extent of the available land in that direction and which would give two dressing-rooms and a kitchen upstairs and enable the boathouse to be enlarged to a corresponding extent, but would not give any increase in the size of the hall, the cost to be £275. The other scheme was to extend the premises on the north side in addition to the west as already proposed. This would give more commodious dressing rooms and kitchen and also enable the hall to be enlarged by 14 ft. at the west end. The cost however was £450. On the first occasion when these proposals were considered, the Committee could not agree and a further special meeting was convened which passed plan 1. Ultimately the second plan was adopted but as the general meeting of 1923 however was so near, no action was taken till after it and the general membership had had a chance to consider and agree with the proposals. Once again, a builder member Tommy Howell was given the contract. Tommy and his two brothers were keen members and his sole desire was to build in the best interests of the Club, which resulted in the building we have today, but the final cost of £473 as against the cost of the original building, is a measure of the steep rise in post war building costs of those days. Of the amount £225 was paid immediately and the rest raised by loan.

Mention was made of the rural setting in which the Club grew up, particularly the hedge along the waterfront. This disappeared in time behind a retaining wall of sleepers, and one recalls the wooden planks that were nailed to the extended uprights, thus affording somewhat primitive seating, the flagstaff tabernacle in the middle of the frontage, and the circular flower-bed in front of it which Walley Green did his best to cultivate, and which a certain member’s dog with equal determination, endeavoured to destroy. As time wore on it became imperative to repair this wooden wall, or build a new one. The latter course was embarked upon as it afforded an opportunity to reclaim a few feet of land. The erection of that wall in 1925 was a concerted effort in every sense of the word. On a fine July evening, over thirty members turned up to shovel concrete. It was realised that the gang would have to work hard and fast, in order to get the wall above the high tide level before the next tide. Three holes had already been dug, to a depth of five feet, footings laid down and connected up with iron rails. The writer nearly became a part of that wall. The gang was organised on orthodox lines to ‘dry’ mix, ‘wet’ mix, and then shovel their results down an improvised chute where it was my job under Albert Beer’s direction to shovel the concrete to him as he required it. The pace grew too hot for me and as I was fast becoming waist-deep in concrete, I struggled to shovel faster to Mr. Beer, who caring more for the consistency of his wall rather than for my plight, chucked it back to me with a “Steady my boy we must get this down right”. Urgent requests to ease the pace were sent aloft. Presently the wall reached its appointed height, the

last piece of shuttering had been slid into position and concrete filled in to the level of its top edge. Then was observed an ominous bulge in the far end of the shuttering! Everyone went home that night full of foreboding, and wondering whether the structure would survive the next tide. It did. But the uneven surface can be observed to this day. The return walls were duly completed and after the filling had settled, another orgy of concreting was indulged in during 1927 when the wharf was surfaced.

In the meantime teak decking had been purchased with the object of building a balcony in front, and its construction is worthy of note in that, whilst the erection of the iron work was put out, the carpentry was done by Bob Jordon. As we have mentioned earlier, Bob was a shipwright, a craftsman of the first waters, but the economic uncertainties of the period between the wars had compelled him to take to the less skilled but more secure building construction. The senior members were glad to have their old friend back on the job again.

By the close of the twenties the major construction work had been completed. It had gone on since the end of the war and each summer saw something new added. The result is the fine building we have today which is the envy of similar and possibly more renowned organisations in the vicinity. The writer has described at some length the material growth of the Club because he believes that the building more than anything else about the Club, symbolises the true character and spirit of several generations of members, willing to sacrifice much time and energy under the leadership of a little group of men who themselves had but one predominant interest, the Club!

In the 31st Annual General Meeting in 1921, a suggestion had been made that work should be put out and the Chairman had replied “Work is the chief source of interest of the Club”. Some prophets do have honour in their own country!

In passing one wonders what we owe to that attribute to the best draughtsman – a stick of Indian Ink. Walley, Charlie, George and Frank all worked within close proximity to one another at the O.S.O. then established in London Road, and it was customary, while they were mixing their ink, prior to the commencement of their day’s work, for them to talk over Club matters and any bright idea that was born would be confided to Albert in the evening.

Chapter 6

Boats and Boating in the Twenties

Brief reference has already been made to the revival of serious rowing after the First World War. Many of the younger members would have liked to see the revival of the old Regatta but we realised the wisdom of the objections raised

Against such revival. It was pointed out that apart from the expense of such a function, the Committee was unwilling to seek the help of local tradespeople and others as they had had to do in the Club’s less prosperous days. Nevertheless this enthusiasm for racing was not to be denied and for several reasons a keenness that two new skiffs were ordered in 1925, and these two boats have been used ever since for the Annual Skiff Competition. Then there was the Pair Oar Competition commenced in 1925 and for this the Heron and Wren were used. These boats were dissimilar, the Wren having wooden rowlocks. She was later fitted with swivel rowlocks to help redress the difference between the two boats, but both craft had seen the best of their days, and so later on a par of pleasure cum racing craft were ordered from Dyers, which could be used either as double scullers or pairs. They were duly named Robin and Swan and afforded a chance of running a more satisfactory competition.

In 1921 the ‘Venetia’ came into our possession. Bob Bunn’s brother on the executive staff of Camper and Nicholson’s was able to apprise the Club of the fact that the Duke of Westminster had no further use for the six oared gig aboard his yacht and was willing to sell. Beautifully fitted out, she must have cost every penny of £200 but she changed hands complete with oars, rowlocks and rudder for £20! We still had the Saxon, and it was hoped that the Venetia would straight keelson, as against the saucer-shape of Venetia, making her a decidedly faster boat. She was nevertheless a very useful as well as imposing acquisition to the Club fleet. It is a pity that in these days she does not get the use or attention she once commanded – but there, who knows what the future holds for rowing? One thing is certain, and that is, the modern outboard motor or small marine engine unit which can be operated by one person has sounded the death knell of the rowing gig, except perhaps in the Navy. Indeed few yachts are built today capable of carrying such a craft, so any specimen afloat is fast becoming a museum piece.

The remarks just made are almost true of the centreboard yacht’s cutter. Whilst this type is perpetuated in the navy under the guise of the Montague Wahler and the Navy Cutter, it must be true to say that no corresponding type is being constructed for private use. The Club came in possession of one of these craft in the “Norseman” the same year “Venetia” was bought. She had a square transom and was 25 ft. long. She was nearly 6ft. beam, rowed four oars, and carried a large balanced lug mainsail which meant of course that the mast was stepped fairly well forward. Carrying no foresail, she must have presented a somewhat unconventional appearance, but for all that she was fast and went about very easily. Among those members who had a knowledge of sailing she was soon in great demand.

One must interrupt the narrative here to explain that the Club trip as such, practically disappeared out of existence. Whereas, in previous times the Captain used to put a notice up on the board inviting members to sign up for a trip, now members preferred to make up their own parties as they chose. One of these parties which continued to use “Norseman” regularly for many seasons was the

“Survey” contingent, which I often accompanied. They had the privilege of taking their annual leave in days, as, and when they liked. Albert of course being his own master, could always arrange to go with them, Walley, Charlie, Albert, Frank, George, Walt Setchell and Bill Brimble and last but not least Tim Long, were regular trippers. Tim is an Irishman, and although for many years was on the Committee, never aspired to be a “High Official”, and took a puckish delight forever pulling their legs by assuming the role of a critical opposition. Tim and his “High Officials” became a byword, and on such occasions as these trips, not a little merriment would be created when Albert would ostentatiously extract his “Daily Telegraph” from his pocket and would immediately invoke volleys of caustic comments from Tim on the mendacity of such a capitalistic rag. It would indeed demand the literary genius of a Charles Dickens adequately to describe this boatload of Club veterans, and would they not have deserved such signal honour?

When the tide served, they made regular trips to Cowes and back in the day. On one occasion we actually went to Beaulieu and back. Then as each season drew to a close we had the “blackberry trip” as near to the middle of September as was convenient. This, like the fishing trips became a tradition. We either made for Fawley or Eaglehurst. I remember one of such occasion returning in “Norseman” from Eaglehurst, when we daren’t hoist sail outside of Calshot. Arrived under the lee of the Castle, where the orderly officer came and informed us that a gale was imminent, we reefed the sail to the limit. The hoisted canvas was no bigger than an afternoon tea cloth, nevertheless 35 minutes after casting off, we were inside Dockhead! On another trip worthy of note, we had arrived off Calshot just as the Royal Southampton Y.C. Regatta was about to commence. The large craft of the ‘J’Class, Wetsward, Lulworth, Britannia, and one of the Shamrocks were jockeying for position and we hoped to sail right through without interfacing with the race. Unfortunately we were becalmed just off the straight at us. The “look-out” on the bow frantically yelled at us to luff but we were helpless. Fortunately the skipper was able to see us and luffed up himself just sufficiently for the huge vessel’s lee rail to pass within six feet of our gunwale. Tim had already removed his jacket in preparation for a dive into the “drink”!

The fishing trips were great fun. Our fishing ground was invariably a spot as near the deep water channel as we dare anchor and in line with the Cadlands Creek mark on the Hythe shore and the Greenland Buoy on the Netley shore. There was a ritual observed for many a long day. For instance, there was the “penny all round” for the largest fish and a similar reward for the first one caught. All fish caught, except the very large ones, were thrown into a common pool and on arrival back at the Club were sorted into piles according to the number who went on the trip. The Captain was made to turn his back on the catch whilst one of the party, pointing to a pile would ask “Whose is this?” The man named carried off his portion of the catch. This same ritual was carried on well into the thirties, so Don Turnbull tells me.

During 1921 – 23 when circumstances allowed me to use “Norseman” quite

a lot and in mid-week, I was often hard put to it to find a crew. However, Tim would contrive to come and bring his son Bill, and I like to think that in those trips, often taken at the expense of a day in the classroom one suspects, were sown in the latter seeds of his future keenness for the water.

As more and more members learned to use her, “Norseman” became a very popular boat and was in regular demand right up to the time of her retirement in the early thirties when she was found to be too tender for further use as a sailing boat. She was sold and became a motor fishing boat with moorings near the Floating Bridge. One thing is certain, and that is the purchase of “Norseman”, marks a turning point in boating activities in the Club, for although “Viking” had been in the Club for many years yet comparatively few members were keen to sail her. With the event of “Norseman” there was a marked increase in interest taken in sailing. This was furthered by the purchase of “Pixie” in 1926 and from that time onwards this inclination towards sail became more and more pronounced.

I doubt if there has been a more popular boat in the Club than “Pixie”. Built in an old shed at the back of 54, Priory Road, by her original owner ‘Mat’ Hooker, she proved to be the fastest boat on the river in her day. She was built primarily for competition in fixtures of the then flourishing Itchen Sailing Club. Constructed of yellow pitch pine and teak she originally carried a small cabin with doors, but this was removed to enhance her qualities as a racing craft. The height from the deck to peak was 26 ft., and she carried a 6ft. bowsprit and 4ft. boom over the stern. In addition, her spinnaker hoisted to within 2ft. of the top of the mast and was guyed out on the end of a 14ft. boom. Her sail area including the spinnaker was approximately 400 sq. ft.

On a recent occasion when I visited ‘Mat’ and his son-in-law, Mr.A.Powell, who used to race with him, I was shown watch chain of medals and a silver teapot all won in contests with Charlie Burch’s “Creole” and “Kiki”, Charlie Chalk’s “Adelaide”, McQuade’s “Syringa”, Sainsbury’s “Surprise” and Walt. Davis were also keen contestants. The contest was for boats over 14 ft. and under 16 ft. and of course all racing was on a handicap basis. For the three years 1906 -7 -8 medals won by “Pixie” were produced showing her as a winner of his handicap competition. The course was approximately from a line opposite the summer house on MacNaughtan’s estate (now in ruins) to a buoy just above Northam Bridge, then back up to a buoy just below the railway bridge opposite Mat’s home “Salterns” and twice round. Her racing flag was a red square with a white diamond. Matt retained “Pixie” until after World War 1 when he sold her. She passed to the hands of Mr. Chamberlain, a former Club member and neighbour a ‘few doors’ up the river, who used her with a little outboard motor to negotiate the bridges. Finally he sold her to the Club. Matt told me with glee off the occasion when “Pixie” was entered for the Bursledon Regatta, the course being from Bursledon, to a mark off Warsash Hard twice round. As it was a quiet day Hooker took out two pigs of lead ballast. Seeing yachts in preparation for the Regatta, the Committee Secretary hailed him and informed him that this was the next race – with waters all larger than himself and including the ‘Dolly Varden’.

There was no time to replace the ballast so he just carried on. The starting gun fired, and he led this fleet in a light air down the Hamble river. Meanwhile the Secretary had realised his mistake and chasing after “Pixie” in the launch apologised and begged ‘Matt’ to carry on. “Pixie” found freshening conditions in the mouth of the river, but still retaining the lead, was first round Bald Head Buoy with “Dolly Varden” just behind. “Here” Matt declared, “I decided that as I had no ballast, my mate was a novice and the course to Black Jack and Greenland buoy would have to be negotiated in an ever freshening breeze, I would run for the mouth of the river where I found the ‘tail ends’ of that race still coming out! Never mind, “Pixie” led those big chaps down the river alright!” I asked Matt how he arrived at the decision to build “Pixie” on the plan that he did and his reply was “Well you know, water likes the shape of some hills, but not others!”

Since she has been a Club boat, “Pixie” has been entered for several regattas and forty years after construction can still hold her own with boats of her own type and size. Her popularity among Club members however, has rested on her use as not only as a day boat but as a weekend cruiser. Fitted with a canopy over the boom in the approved style, two or even three people can sleep comfortably on the floorboards. Very many enjoyable camping holidays and weekends have been spent in her and every creek and harbour inside the Wight has seen her at sometime or other. The writer may be pardoned for mentioning a memorable cruise in the late twenties when he, George Carter and Syd Ganly, took “Pixie” to Fawley and from thence to Sinah Lake insideLangstone Harbour. Here, Syd left us and my father joined us to sail around Langstone to Chichester. Bembridge, Newtown, Lymington and Beaulieu were all visited in the course of a ten day trip. Then again in the Whitsun of 1939, Bill Long with the late Arthur Ryder and Terry Delaney made a night passage round the Island in her. Leaving the Club late on the Saturday afternoon they reached Beaulieu River at 9 o’clock, rounded the Needles at 1 a.m. the following morning and were off St.Catherine’s at 4.30 a.m. They moored up outside Bembridge at 10 a.m. and eventually fetched up at off Gins Farm at 5 p.m. Records for fast passages are freely claimed. For example, on one occasion, the above pair did the round trip from the Club to the Winners off Langston Harbour and back in the day, whilst on another occasion Dudley Sebborn and Don Turnbull sailed to Newtown and back in the hours of summer daylight. One could continue to recall such stories by the score, but time and space will not allow. Of more importance is the fact that “Pixie” is still a very sound boat and will no doubt provide members with excellent sailing for a long time yet. With “Pixie” as with other boats one fact can never be lost sight of and that is the tendency on the part of individual members to “adopt” as it were a particular boat, and “Pixie’s” earliest ‘foster-parent’ was Frank Gosselin. Frank was captain when she was bought and he was at great pains to see that she was well looked after. Others have followed in his stead, and many owe their knowledge of boat upkeep and fitting out, to their attentions to “Pixie”.

Last but by no means least, in some ways it seems like introducing the follower of the Lord Mayor’s show when one speaks of “Viking”. I refer now to the successor in name of the red-sailed boat that had now been disposed of. As a craft in very good condition when purchased she was cheap at £12

And the members of the day were very well satisfied with the purchase. She was originally ketch-rigged with a mizzen not much larger than a pocket handkerchief and a main and fore sail of similar proportion. Because of this rig she carried a tiller with a U bend in the middle in order to negotiate the mizzen mast. She would run and reach but would not beat in anything of a sea, every wave just stunning her, and forcing the helmsman to fall away. She was a much abused boat – in more than one sense. People’s aversion to her grew with their ambitions for better sailing, and efforts were made to improve her, by giving her a larger centre plate and turning her into a sloop, all without much success. But the records of the twenties and thirties are abundantly sprinkled with requests for her use at weekends, and her log is not entirely devoid of interest, for on one historic occasion Roy Duncan and Len McQuade made the round trip to Ryde Pier and back in a day. As time went on she became the novices’ boat, and as such came in for some rough treatment, and was on more than one occasion capsized. At the beginning of the war, she was left on the mud, and would have rotted to bits, but she was hauled up in time retimbered and made serviceable for the limited up river boating available. When however, she was recently sold for £35, many felt that it was like parting with an old friend that had done us yeoman service.

Chapter 7

“OARS AND SAILS” – The Thirties

As the Club grows older and the outstanding events of its life appear across the sea of time like ships in line ahead, it devolves on the narrator of its history to preserve its continuity, and to beware of destroying the idea of gradual evolution by passing rapidly from one periodic review to the next. Yet he is, I am sure justified in regarding the “thirties” as a genuine transition period. To begin with, the Club was by now firmly established on its own ground and in its own headquarters, extended and enlarged, and all the big building projects were complete. Every summer since the end of the first World War had seen folk on some constructional work or other, which they worked in with their Saturday trips down the river. Now, the older members could, so to speak, sit back and contemplate their handiwork, whilst the younger folk enjoyed to the full the facilities that were now available to them.

But I suppose the most far reaching change was the ever greater place sailing was taking in Club activities. This was coupled with an increase in down river trips, and by the time under review, the weekend camp was now an established feature of Club life. New camping grounds were discovered, first at Brownwich and later, when the whalers came along, Folly Inn up the Medina River. This latter trend reflects in a minor way the change in social conditions, as more and more folk enjoyed the privilege of a holiday on Saturdays.

The sailing interest was no doubt accelerated by the fact that pulling gigs

or yacht gigs were no longer available. The only one that might have been of service to the Club was turned down because, although quite new, she leaked badly when heeled to the breeze. The Committee were therefore more or less obliged to consider other types of craft and so the ill fated ‘Iverna’ was purchased in 1933 and soon after in 1935 and 1937 the whalers ‘Verbena’ and ‘Norseman’ were added to the fleet. Then to add zest to our up-river boating the two scows were purchased in 1936 and so popular have these boats been with members that a third one was invested in a year or so ago. “We are all sailors today, and all capable of showing how we might have won the America Cup. Many a hopeful crew wept last season in the ‘Iverna’, ‘Pixie’ or ‘Viking’ and returned to tell how they had “overhauled other boats….” So wrote the Secretary in his 1936 Report. Indeed, so strong had sailing become, that there was even a proposal to alter the name of the Club to St. Denys Rowing and Sailing Club, but tradition was even stronger, and the resolution was lost. Whatever new name may be suggested, the old one will die hard. St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club or just simply the “Rowing Club” conveys to all who have heard, or belonged to it much the same thoughts of pride and feeling of respect as when one hears the illustrious names of famous cavalry regiments of bygone days, knowing as we do, that their personnel have for many years now, discarded their horses and spurs, for tanks and dungarees.

But we must press on. Another change is worth noticing and that is in the vicissitudes of Club Entertainments. It is a remarkable fact that as the amenities of the hall were gradually improved, our own dances and whist drives received less and less support from the rank and file of the Club. In 1924, £104 was made on Club functions. A regular fortnightly dance could easily be run, as well as a monthly whist drive, all of which were backed up by the members themselves. This flourishing state of affairs occurred before there were kitchens or the hall was decorated as it is today, or even before the maple floor was laid. From that time there was a gradual decline until in 1933 the whist drives were abandoned and the dances run at intermittent intervals, as the committee of the day thought fit. Returns for club functions went as low as £24 in 1932 but there was a recovery in 1935 when £45 resulted. In spite of everything, certain functions have always maintained their popularity. The Club Socials have certainly become a tradition. They have drawn together members and their friends for an afternoon-and-evening’s enjoyment in a way that possibly no other function has done, Time was, when Albert Beer would oblige with a recitation, which he endeavoured to make topical, and there was much merriment and eager conjecture as to who the next but of his kindly humour would be. Mrs. Owen, wife of Charlie, a member of the Committee for many years, sang superbly and was always a delight to listen to. Later on, others followed in their train. For many seasons Ashly Bickers obliged with his conjuring shows whilst Ron Chandler and the late Connie Olgilwy (better known then as Connie Cross) entertained us. Today, George Wetherill and Marjorie Pearce have joined the group of folk we like to hear, and an added attraction has of late been a Punch and Judy show for the benefit of future members and their lady friends. One of the most pleasing aspects of these socials is that of reunion. Present and past members with their families come together for a brief spell to talk over ‘old times’, and enjoy a row up to the Mill and back.

The other functions that have survived are of course the New Year’s and Easter Monday dances. These of course will always be successful; but it is questionable whether the support has come mainly from members. At a recent Club dance it was encouraging however, to see a preponderance of members and their friends.

To return to a more detailed story of the ‘thirties’ we commence with what was tantamount to a revolution in the ideas of the Committee who had done all the work they could manage themselves, stage-laying, wall-building, concrete-paving and chiefly the annual painting and varnishing of the boats. This of course saved the Club hundreds of pounds. Before the hall was built the annual income was limited to members’ subscriptions and a few donations which amounted to £40 per annum. If in those days, the work had been put out, there would have been no progress, but by doing things themselves the Committees were able to buy the ground on which the boathouse stands and afterwards the hall and new boats as required. The building of the hall specially increased our income, paid for itself, and put the club in a strong financial position but with these improvements came a gradual decline in the voluntary work. The older members of the Committee generally led, as of course their responsible positions required them to do, but for various entirely good reasons their numbers dwindled until only two folk in 1930 regularly carried on during the winter months, the annual overhaul of the boats. This caused a climax, and the Committee decoded to recommend to the Annual General Meeting, that the work should be contracted out, and should be paid for partly by increased subscription. This meant a departure from the voluntary principle which had worked so well in the past. The Secretary then wrote “There is no doubt that in the present day, men have many interests and pleasures and do not make a hobby of any one thing, as in the past circumstances often compelled them to do.” Yet, fifteen or sixteen years after these words were written, circumstances in the form of shortage of labour and terrifically high costs which would easily have absorbed our finances on the renovation of boats, have persuaded the Club to fall back once again on the voluntary principle, and although the work is decidedly heavier than it was hitherto by virtue of our ownership of three whalers which have to be maintained, it is gratifying to note that for a number of seasons since the second World War, there has been a sufficient response to the request for help to enable the work of painting and varnishing to be carried on. This is somewhat remarkable in an age when folk on all sides are bewailing the fact that modern youth wants to be waited on hand and foot, and shuns responsibility in any form. The Annual General Meeting of 1930 agreed to the proposal without dissent and Sweetingham was engaged to do up the boats. There was of course still much executive and organising work to be done by the Committee.

The Skiff Tournament in 1930 was one of the most successful of recent years for there was a very large entry. Will Long wrested the Cup from Maurice Andrews who had held it for three years in succession. Will demonstrated once again the value of constant training, by the comparative ease with which he eliminated his opponents. That same year the Lee Shield, presented for the Pair Oar Competition was won for the first time by Cyril Ellery and Percy Arnold, who were therefore the first to have their names engraved on this trophy. Cyril pursued his path of victory by winning the Hoskyns Cup on four occasions out of the next five.

The odd occasion was in 1933 when the writer paddled himself to victory for the one and only time in this event. Later, in 1934 Cyril and he together won the Pair Oar trophy. Cyril again won the Cup in 1946 in his return from the Forces and in spite of a tendency for his shadow to grow, (or perhaps because of it) he still enters for the event.

It was round about 1931 that two more improvements were made in the hall, the interior decoration where-by the bareness of the old brick walls was relieved, and a year or so later the maple floor was laid. Once again Albert was to the fore in planning the decoration we have today. It is perhaps not inappropriate to reflect on the far-sightedness and wisdom of the Committee who built the present headquarters. The hall letting, as has already been stated, has been by far the largest source of income, and by means of it the Club has been relieved of those financial worries contingent upon running such an organisation.

At no time has this source shown signs of breaking down, and even in the times of slump, £150 in a year was feasible. Through this our Club improvements have been possible, and as an example of the year by year improvement made possible the following is illuminating:-

1923 Paid for new dressing rooms and extension of building £478

1925 Two new boats……………………………………….. 80

1926 Pavilion………………………………………………. 185

1927 New boats…………………………………………….. 72

1928 Panelling and decorating hall…………………………. 114

1929 New Boats……………………………………………… 108

1930 New Piano……………………………………………… 100

1931 Maple Floor…………………………………………….. 68

Total £1198

Mention has already been made of new blood into the Club at the beginning of the ‘Thirties’ and we return to their story. By 1933 regular weekends were being spent by parties taking ‘Saxon’ and ‘Venetia’ and also ‘Pixie’ and ‘Viking’. Brownwich was the rendezvous and there for a year or two members of St. Denys Amateur Rowing club firmly hoisted their burgee. The season of 1934 was a wonderful one. There were trips every weekend and among those who joined that party were Ellery and Rivers, the Longs, Buckett and Turnbull, McQuade, Jack Wright, Reg Gosney, (the runner), Jack Boater, ‘Barney’ Ryder, Charlie Day, Barlow, Brading, Astridge (Aspro to friends), Grinsted, Dalaney, John Andrews and Jack Griffiths, a goodly company withal, and the tales of hilarious nights by the shores of Southampton Water would fill a volume of their own. The autumn previous was noteworthy because of the purchase of ‘Iverna’ from Poole. The keenness of the younger members for down-river craft intensified the search for suitable craft, and presently it came to the knowledge of the Committee that ‘Iverna’ a centreboard boat lying at Poole, was for sale. She was found to be an old boat formerly belonging to the racing yacht ‘Iverna’, but being built of teak was still in good condition although a fair amount of renovation would be needed. At £10, she was a bargain and the Club decided to purchase her. In mid September

a party including Buckett, Randall, Sebborn, Turnbull, Long, Rivers and the writer went to Poole and sailed her round. Leaving Poole Harbour about 10 a.m. on the Saturday, a wonderful autumn day, with a steady breeze slightly heading us, we crossed Bournemouth Bay, making two seaward legs and arriving off Hurst at 6 p.m. We decided to put into Newtown for the night where Mr. Roy kindly obliged us with a tent in the garden by Shalfleet Quay which had by now become well known among Club personnel. At low tide, we were able to examine more closely our purchase and noticed her pronounced saucer shape.

She carried a foredeck and a short bowsprit, and although otherwise an open boat she also carried inside ballast. The run up the Solent on the morrow proved her to be all that was claimed of her – a stiff fast boat. She was reputed to have belonged at one time to the Mediterranean Fleet and had been used by them for racing purposes. Because of her ancestry, the Committee named her ‘Iverna’. During that winter and the following summer, our new acquisition was thoroughly overhauled. Several new knees were replaced by Frank Gosselin, whilst Albert Beer devised and constructed a tabernacle for the mast. The foredeck was re-canvassed and she was fitted with a new keel-plate.

By the end of the season of 1934, ‘Iverna’ had become a very popular boat and a new suit of canvass was ordered for her and made all in readiness for the following season.

1935 was marred by the only catastrophe that had ever overtaken a Club boat during the whole of its long existence. On Sunday, May 12th, ‘Iverna’ was lost in the Solent and Leslie Ponaro, one of the Club’s youngest members was drowned. The party which also included, Turnbull, Buckett, McQuade, A.J.White, L.Evans, Ryder and G.Randall, left the Club in ‘Iverna’ at 8.30 in the morning and all went well until about half past eleven. The weather was fine and there was a comfortable sailing breeze. The wind was E. to N.E. and appeared lighter after leaving Calshot. It was abeam at the time of the accident when ‘Iverna’ was sailing close-hauled under full mainsail, a reef having been considered unnecessary. A sudden squall, the approach of which had been unobserved, and for which the crew was unprepared, struck the boat. The jib sheet was cleated but the mainsail which at no time had been made fast was immediately released. Although the helm was put down she did not answer. She immediately filled and went down, dragging the tow dinghy Magpie with her. Everything had happened so suddenly that there had been no time even to free the dinghy. Ponaro who was unable to swim and was wearing sea-boots, was seen by McQuade and Turnbull to go straight down and nothing could be done to help him. Meanwhile the remainder, except McQuade, who was a very strong swimmer, clung to oars, or the food-box which floated clear. Very fortunately for the rest, Group Captain Playne, who in his yacht ’Maud’ was about a mile away at the time, saw the accident and immediately put about. By dint of a very smart seamanship on his part and on that of the paid hand, they arrived back in time to pick up the other seven members of the Club, who had kept themselves afloat for nearly twenty minutes. McQuade, Buckett, Ryder and White were first picked up, another by means of a line, and the other two by the paid hand in ‘Maud’s’ dinghy. Captain Playne administered stimulants to all and supplied dry clothing and brought them as speedily as possible back to Cracknore Hard, where they were landed and further cared for by Mrs. Husband. There is no

doubt that only the skilful action of Captain Playne and his man saved an even worse tragedy, for which heartfelt gratitude was expressed on all sides.

The tragedy is told as it was related by one of those present, at the inquiry which was held subsequently by the Committee, and it was with some diffidence that the writer was persuaded by Keith Buckett and Don Turnbull to record the incident in any detail. “You are writing a history of the Club and therefore the story must be told. Besides, much was learned from the accident, “they declared. Be that as it may, I feel that the real lesson is that completely open ballasted boats are a snare and a delusion, especially for Club use. Suffice it to say that since then, no boat except “Pixie”, which is half –decked, carries ballast, and since the war, the three whalers and Redwing, the Admiralty dinghy, have all been fitted with buoyancy tanks. On Charlie Gordon’s recommendation after the accident, “Pixie’s” cushions were stuffed with kapok as an added precaution. One pleasing feature that arose out of the affair was the close acquaintance that grew up between Captain Playne and the Club. He lent us his library of yachting books to read, and a number of members went cruising in “Maud”. Another was the expression of sympathy that came from neighbouring Clubs at the loss of one of our members. Sometime later, ‘Magpie’s’ Painter parted and she surfaced and was blown ashore at Ryde. Also a few oars were washed up and their recovery reported to the Club.

The loss of “Iverna” cast a gloom over the Club and the Annual Social arranged for that season in June was cancelled, but enthusiasm for sailing was in no way impaired. That same summer Admiralty whalers lying at Gosport were inspected and “Verbena” a twenty-five footer was purchased. Although built in 1918, she was still in good condition and the idea was to try her as a Club boat, so that in the event of the experiment being unsuccessful the £16 spent on her would not represent a tremendous loss to the Club. As it turned out she was a success right from the start. These boats with their somewhat squat rig are designed to take a lot of weather, but his one, in subsequent regattas for which she was entered, proved to be very fast as well. Her purchase gave opportunity to members now developing a keenness for sail to explore the Solent and in the following years Brownwich was gradually abandoned in favour of Newtown and later Wootton. As has already been mentioned, the Roys of Shalflat took a lease of the ruins of the old barn at Shalfleet Quay. Here Mr.Roy senior erected a shack and showing some enterprise set up as a yacht chandler. He also proceeded to let out the orchard nearby to campers, and so it was that on every available occasion, Club members and boats could be identified among those who foregathered to inspect the craft moored up at the quay.

Another camping spot favoured by earlier generations of campers was lower down at Lower Hamstead Quay. In days gone by, boats could be moored there in the deep water channel with a chance of getting out soon after dead low water. No alas, as a result of the dykes being breached, the water that used to run through the bunny and scour out a channel there escapes elsewhere and so everything is silted up. At Wootton there are no camping facilities, but as always happens where members of the Club are concerned, they managed to insinuate themselves into the good offices of Mr.Batt of Hayles Yard who placed a derelict yacht at their disposal whenever they cared to put into the Creek. They were also

made honorary members of Wootton Sailing Club.

The purchase of another whaler “Norseman” in 1937 enabled more members than ever to spend week-ends in the Island, and yet another popular rendezvous was the “Folly Inn” at Whippingham. The River Medina became popular in 1938 and 1939 especially when the weather was unsuitable for people to go further afield. Many “dustings” have been experienced on the trip from Cowes to Calshot. It was found that even in really bad weather whalers could proceed as far every week-end throughout the summer and it became almost a point of honour that one boat at least should leave the Club. During this period ‘Johnnie’ Rivers was the leading light in these expeditions whilst Cyril Ellery used to organise regular mixed trips in the “Venetia”.

The scows have, since 1936 provided us with up river sailing and an annual knock-out competition has been very keenly contested. Sailing over a triangular course between the Brewery and Cobden Bridge, many good races have been witnessed from the hard.

Coincident with this upsurge of sailing enthusiasm has been the steady but less spectacular use of the rowing boats. Right through the summer seasons members have exercised themselves in the skiffs or taken their friends out in the cock-and-hens or double scullers. The Skiff Competition has been held regularly whilst the Pair oar was only once abandoned owing to lack of support. Even the most hardened sailing veteran will admit that rowing a boat is the first chapter in water lore.

Meanwhile the veteran band still took a lively interest in the organisation they had been largely responsible for creating. Commanding the deepest respect, and confidence of the entire membership there was never a question that they should hold office as long as they were able. Nevertheless, it was inevitable that time would take its toll. Walley Green retired from the Survey in 1929 and at the 40th Annual General Meeting, did not seek re-election as President as he knew he was leaving the Town. He had been forty years in office in various capacities, secretary, captain, and president and he was paid the highest compliment the Club could pay by being made a life member. To the last, he was proud of the fact that he held his own Club key and could come and go when he liked. Later on he retired with his wife always a loyal supporter in his work for the Club, to a house in Wootton right beside the river, and it was characteristic of him that, after all his furniture was gone, he arose early one morning and rowed his boat from Dyer’s yard to his new home. There, he and Mrs. Green settled down to a happy old age, both joining in local affairs and helping in deserving causes – so typical of them both. His garden, there as in Bitterne, was his joy and with that, and trips to the mouth of the river when fish were about, his time was well occupied. Whenever an opportunity occurred for anyone from the Club to put in at Wootton, he was sure of a very warm welcome. Unfortunately, the arthritic condition of his legs, a malady that had affected him for many years, grew worse till finally during World War 2 he was only just able to hobble about with the aid of a stick. Yet he had his garden dug and insisted on planting his own potatoes by the expedient of sitting on a box and dragging it forward as required. Walley died in March 1947 and his old friends of many years, George and Charlie, were able to be present to pay their own and the Club’s last tribute.

Meanwhile, Albert had died some years before, in 1936. He had maintained an active interest to the very last, still retaining office as the Club’s Treasurer. As we mentioned earlier on, there was hardly a job in wood or metal that Albert wouldn’t attempt and do efficiently. In 1930, one of his last efforts was the construction of the bathing box which stood under the pavilion: another was the nest of lockers which are still in use. In the intervening six years, his gradually declining strength caused him regretfully to hand over to younger men the practical work he so much enjoyed. In the June and July of 1936 his friends noticed a real change in him. He was weaker, yet he insisted on taking his regular walk to the Club. On one such occasion he complained of feeling unwell and a couple of days later had passed on. Thus wrote the Secretary at the time:- “The Club has suffered the loss of our dear old friend, Albert Beer, and there are no other words which express the feeling of all members of the Club towards him. He joined in 1893 and with one exception was the oldest member. From the day he joined, until his death, his was a story of unflagging interest in the wellbeing of the Club which increased as the years went on. He was never as happy, as when engaged in doing some work for the Club…….His memory will long endure us all.” The seascape hanging in the Hall was given in memory by Mrs. Beer.

Thus Charlie, George and Frank were left to carry on, but with the assistance of younger men who had already proved their worth over the previous decade. During the ‘twenties’, a number of young men joined, whose virility ensured that whatever else happened, the Club would never succumb owing to lethargy, or atrophy because of lack of ideas.

Peter Hoare, whose sudden and deeply lamented death recently, came as a great shock to us all, joined the Club in 1923. He became Hall Secretary in 1925, a post he held with distinction for nine years, when it was taken over by Cyril Ellery who was then Vice Captain. He became Treasurer on the death of Albert Beer, and Hon. Secretary in 1946 on the retirement of George Cotton from that post. In 1949 he was elected President in recognition for his services to the Club. In his younger days he used to row and one year he succeeded with Bill Snowdon in winning the Pair Oar Competition. I well recollect (and no doubt others do) how Peter used to finish his race in a welter of perspiration. Peter’s other interests were tennis and the theatre. He was a keen dancer and helped with, and gave enthusiastic support at all times to the Club’s social activities. One of his last tasks was the organisation of a Club dance.

Cyril Ellery was another of this vintage who threw himself heart and soul into the activities of the Club. Elected in 1922, he soon took an interest in the rowing competitions. He and the writer have had many a doughty battle in the Skiff Competition in which Cyril definitely had the advantage. He was for some time Vice-Captain and then later took over the management of the Hall when Peter Hoare gave up. He has, except for the interruption of the war years when he joined H.M.Forces, served the Club in this capacity ever since, and has recently undertaken the joint task of General Secretary with that of management of the Hall. When one reflects that in 1951, the Club received £455 by letting the Hall, one

realises what mountains of work this entails, and what we owe to whoever undertakes the task. The hall letting is the lynch-pin of the Club’s success, for on it depends our very strong financial position and opportunity for reasonably cheap boating.

George Rivers, better known to us all as Johnnie is probably the most knowledgeable man in the Club where maintenance of boats and gear is concerned. As Vice-Captain and Captain he had demonstrated that rare capacity of organising the work during the winter and seeing that it was done. He has been known to spring clean the boat-house from top to bottom all on his own and the present method of stowage of gear is largely due to him. Johnnie has passed through the Presidential Chair, an honour nobody would question. Then with these there appeared a number of other youngsters who were destined to make their mark, Keith Buckett, son of the late Arthur Buckett who organised whist drives and dances in his day, Don Turnbull, Len McQuade, Bill Long (now old enough to join), the Wright brothers, who all earned their place on the Committee at one time or another and contributed to the general weal.

Of the personnel of the Club during the thirties much has been written already but our story would be incomplete if we did not mention the lamented death of George Randall at almost the same time as Albert Beer. George had become a very keen member and his passing was a real loss to the Club. Also, Stanley Nineham who had been a member for 35 years and Cecil Clarke, Bill Snowdon and Bobbie Bunn all of long standing, resigned their membership; likewise Lewis Hansford and Roy Watradge reluctantly left us, but we are glad to say that both are back again in the fold. ‘Lew’ audited the accounts for many years but business intervened whilst Roy became part owner in his own boat. He has now assumed responsibilities of Treasurer, a post we hope he will hold for many years. Harry Wright who interested himself on the entertainments side also found it necessary to give up.

The years immediately prior to the war produced a desire further to improve the premises of the Club. Beside the renewal of the stage which was undertaken in 1938 there was a proposal to extend the sea wall in order to afford a clearer view up the river. Then in 1939 as the 50th anniversary of the Club was approaching the suggestion was made to build a Club room for members under the present ladies’ dressing-room. Charlie Gordon submitted the plan in June 1939 but like every other good intention it was destined to be shelved as the clouds of war approached once more.

Chapter 8

“THROUGH MORE WAR STORMS TO THE PRESENT DAY”

On May 7th 1939, the St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club completed 50 years of successful existence. The occasion was however allowed to pass without any

celebration to mark the event, although all were conscious and proud of the fact that during all these years, such progress had been made and maintained as no other athletic club in the Town could claim. But as we have seen there were schemes afoot for the construction of a club-room apart from the Hall where members could meet one another, and had not the outbreak of war intervened, the ceremonial opening of this addition to Club amenities would most certainly have been used to celebrate the dual event, on the Club’s fiftieth birthday. Instead, the plan had to be put into cold storage, where it still remains owing to prohibitive post-war costs and restrictions.

The usual autumn activities of the Club were brought abruptly to a close, whilst members, caught up in the imbroglio of war, were scattered to the four winds. Of those who remained, many had to seek new means of livelihood, and to add to our disabilities, the river was closed for the use of small craft below Nortam Bridge. Although the interest of members had been diverted to matters of greater importance and sterner duty, yet a nucleus remained whose circumstances allowed them to carry on between shifts at the ‘workbench’, spells at the A.R.P. post, or Home Guard parades, until the return of brighter days. Bill Long and Don Dymott were among these and between them and such incidental help they could muster, they hauled out and laid up all the boats. Cyril Ellery was one of the first to be called up, and he was sent to France, so Peter Hoare once more stepped into the breach and took over the management of the Hall. Ern Giles who had become Club Captain following on John Rivers, was called from the Town so John resumed the office. Another whose war work unfortunately compelled him to give up was Frank Gosselin. One of the little band who had worked together for so many years, he was, after the style of Albert Beer, an adept at improvisation and repair. Through summer and winter he followed a routine as regular as clockwork. Leaving the Survey at 4.30 he would, after a bit of tea, dash off on his bike to be at the Club by 5 o’clock. He would then work on till seven or eight o’clock then hurry off to his game of whist. In the early days of wireless he was a keen amateur who used to wind his own ‘basket’ could to pick up 2LO or 6BM. Equal to his enthusiasm for wireless was that for fishing. During the season he lost no opportunity to organise a fishing trip. He was quick too, and many a time has he been seen to haul u o two fish to everybody else’s one. He was earnest and thorough. Hooks were sharpened on a fine stone, line was tested, and, being a disciple of that school of thought which believes in the use of a bell, he was always ready with his clothes-peg adaptation. One of my most poignant memories of the war concerns Frank. It was after an air raid and Cedar Road had “caught it”. As soon as possible I hurried along from Oxford Road and arrived to find poor old Frank standing very forlorn, surrounded by a heap of debris that had once been his home and holding something evidently just rescued from the rubble. It was his fishing reel! At one time he was a member of the Southampton Model Yacht Club and took part in those regular Saturday contests held on the Yacht Pond many years ago. For many a long day however, Frank’s chief interest has been centred in the Club. He has occupied the offices of Captain and Vice-Captain over a long stretch of Club history and his chief objective apart from the enjoyment derived from the boating, was to save expense by his own ingenuity and effort. He loved to pit his wits against the results of fair wear and tear, or crass carelessness, as the case may be, so that nothing was scrapped if it was capable

of being repaired. His organisation of the “Survey” trips down to the last detail was typical of him. There was general regret that with the return of peace, Frank felt unable to resume his place among his old friends, but one and all were glad that he was able to join us at our Jubilee Dinner in 1950.

During the first few months of the ‘phoney ‘war, Committee meetings were held behind blackout curtains often punctuated by the wail of the siren. As the premises were still being used quite frequently, it is not surprising to find that the Club fell an easy and early victim to the blackout restrictions and we were fined five pounds. As the war proceeded and bombs began to fall, Club activities drew gradually to a standstill. One morning, after a night raid, an official of the A.R.P. came to tell me that the Hall had been commandeered for storage of property of raid victims. The Hall was used for this purpose for several months until the Home Guard took it over to use as Headquarters. This obtained until the end of the war.

After the severe raids of 1940 George Cotton was compelled to evacuate, for the nervous strain which ultimately brought about her blindness was already beginning to tell on his wife. It was about this time that I returned to the town to find the Club practically deserted. I happened to meet Bill Long one morning and we discussed the question of closing down altogether. It was a phase in the war when my work brought me in contact with young students attending courses at University College, and many of these were glad to avail themselves of such facilities as the Club could offer our decision to try and carry on proved sound in more ways than one. Of those lads who joined in the war years, several are with us today. Don Bishop and the Isaacs brothers have become the vanguard of the present generation of members. Don may be described as the focal point of Club activity immediately after the war, and it was a sad blow when he was recently transferred to London. As regards the Isaacs brothers, I think it must be unique that grandfather Baker should seek election to the Club with grandson Ted Isaacs. Later, Phil joined, and they have been Vice-Captain and Captain respectively. The election referred to occurred on the occasion of the 54th A.G.M. held in Highfield Institute in 1943. As already explained, we were deprived of our own Hall, and since there had been no meeting of member since 1940 and Committee meetings were called when circumstances allowed, it was felt that an effort should be made to call members together to let them decide on the future activities of the Club during wartime. It was inevitable that there should be a change in personnel during these years and indeed, of the 96 who were members in 1940 (22 were elected then), only 36 were on the books in 1942, although the Club was up to full strength. Over 40 joined H.M. Forces and were duly elected as honorary members.

With such membership as ours, it was inevitable that the War would take its toll and so it was with great sorrow we learned of the death of C.J. Clench and Ron Witcher.

Regarding the war years in retrospect, we feel it was a mercy that the premises survived the bombing. A settlement of £7.17.6. by the War Damage Commission indicates the trivial damage that was caused on two occasions. The nearest bomb, an oil type one, fell on a house in Priory Road opposite the end of Priory Avenue, and I remember vividly with what apprehension I overheard someone remark that

the Rowing Club had ‘got it’, and how I hastened to make certain of the true facts and the relief I experienced when I knew that the Club was undamaged. Had the damage been more serious with, perhaps, the destruction of several boats or even total loss, it is doubtful whether, with today’s high costs and scarcity of materials, we could have replaced our losses. It was therefore with thankful hearts that members returned to civilian life after the war to find the Club almost as they had left it.

With the conclusion of hostilities in 1945, those who had joined our company during the war, were able for the first time to enjoy down river boating which was resumed as soon as the ban was lifted and willing hands had put the whalers and dinghies into commission. After a spar with bureaucratic officialdom in which the Club was involved in a deal of unnecessary delay and financial loss the hall was again made available for letting. After the Home Guard had handed it over to us we had hoped to resume letting straight away, bur someone discovered that we did not hold a licence for such a purpose. The mere fact that the Hall had been used in this way since the erection of the building would not placate officials in the fastness’s of the Civic Centre. Why, under negotiations, still remains a mystery. Since then however, the hall has been in great demand and as these notes are written there seems to be no likelihood of the ‘boom’ breaking. The Rowing Club Hall is now more than ever it was, the social centre of the locality.

The Annual Report for 1945 as it appears in the book, is of special interest to one who has attempted both by word of mouth and by interpreting the written word, to piece together in some sort of readable form the story of the Club. Of the long series of reports of Committee meetings and annual reports covering a period of forty-two years this is the last in George Cotton’s handwriting. When the war was over, he felt that it was time for someone more in touch with the younger members taking over the secretaryship. He wound up his last year’s survey with these word:- “I will conclude on a personal note, I have never before mentioned myself in any report during the 42 years I have been secretary. Throughout that time, until comparatively recent years, I have given most of my leisure and energy in doing all I could for the club. I have watched it grow from abject poverty to the prosperous state in which it is now, and I am proud of the part I have shared with others in doing it. It has been a great source of happiness to me to recall the many scores of days spent in the old gigs down the river and the twelve successive years when I camped by the shores of the Solent using the gigs for daily trips……” Yes, his association with the Club is now nigh on sixty years and one might pause for a moment to reflect on the changes he has witnessed from the time when both shores of Southampton Water were pleasantly wooded, far from the madding crowd, and free from all accretions associated with oil refining; when one might go ashore at Netley and have the good fortune, as he had, to see Queen Victoria leave the hospital in her carriage, till a very recent occasion, when he saw the “Fawley” the first oil-tanker, tie up at the latest 3.000 ft. jetty built for the new refinery, just below Fawley beacon. His memory goes back to the last of the sail and steam craft that used the port, he remembers the glories of a departed era when, during Cowes week, the Roads would be thronged with large, clipper bowed steam-yachts all gleaming white, whose home during their layup

would be our own yards up the Itchen. He has seen many a contest between the J Class racers with Britannia and one of the Shamrocks as competitors. He remembers boat trips to Fawley when it was a remote village and its sole means of communications with Southampton and the outer world was by a ferry run to the Town Quay by the landlord of the “Jolly Sail”, Martin by name, whom I can just recall along with the giant calceolarias which adorned the porch of his premises, and who, it seems, being an ex-naval man kept his premises spotlessly clean, and took a poor view of anyone who dared to drop matches on his sawdust. George has seen the earliest Calshot based waterplanes, the Schneider Trophy plane and the latest Brabazon fly over Southampton Water. These are but a few of the changes in the kaleidoscopic scene that he has been privileged by long life and good health to observe.

He was elected a life member, and when Charlie Gordon retired to London a few months later, he was elected president. It was very unfortunate that as a result of his inability to agree to a licenced bar being provided at Club dances, he felt compelled to resign. Although he has dissociated himself from all Club management, he still takes a lively interest in its affairs. At the youthful age of eighty-two he still enjoys a trip down the river and will jump to take an oar should the occasion arise. Although failing sight makes it impossible for him to street a course, yet he loves to take the helm whilst someone gives him sailing directions.

Charlie Gordon relinquished his presidency a few months before, and was in like manner awarded the Club’s highest honour. His interests took him to Thames Ditton where we hear from him on occasion. Charlie will always be remembered first for his ability as an organiser, for whenever any big scheme was afoot, he was there to see it through. Quite often too, the drawings from which the job was being constructed were his drawings. His sense of proportion and extreme tact always stood him in good stead as it did in later years when he was elected chairman of the Committee. He could, in a wonderful way he has with him, persuade the most slothful to work. He believed that an ounce of example was better than a ton of precept, and would for instance pick up two stage scrubbers, place one at your feet and straightaway proceed to scrub the stage with the other. One couldn’t help but take the gentle hint! He was purposeful in all that he did, and never lost an opportunity to turn hid time at the Club to good account, or convert the smallest and seemingly most unlikely piece of jetsam to some useful purpose.

So these two friends retired from the arena of Club affairs almost together, as they had begun together, thus removing from the active scene the remainder of that little band of pioneers whose life interest, or hobby, or call it what you will, has been centred in the Club. It was they who by their ceaseless zeal moulded its character and built up its tradition. They indicated above all else what membership of a Club like ours really means; and although it may change the type of boating it offers a dozen times (although I sincerely hope it won’t) yet the spirit of service in the common interest is well and truly established.

The continuity of effort over the major part of its history has contributed largely by the Club’s greatness. The secretaryship over 55 of the sixty years has been held by four men, Walley Green for ten years, followed for a short spell by Tommy Thomas and then George Cotton forty-two years, followed by the late Peter Hoare and Cyril Ellery.

The Captaincy has been held by Green, Gordon, Gooselin and Rivers over a total period of thirty-five years, whilst the running of the hall necessitated the creation of another office – that of Hall Secretary, - and this has been held by Alf Lewis, Hoare and Ellery between them since its inception. The treasureship, now occupied by a doughty member of long standing, Roy Watridge, was held by Mr. Beer from the time of the inception of the office in 1918 till his death. All this contributed to stability but not stagnation, as the story unfolded in these pages has shown, and I would say that the motif in the pattern of human relationships during all these years has been the sheer joy of creating something, of exercising ingenuity and professional talent, of determination to overcome difficulties in the cause of the Club everyone had so much at heart.

And what has endangered that spirit? The warp and woof of the pattern is not easy to define but undoubtedly it originated in THE RIVER, up to the Swan if you like, or down as far as you like, and as Kenneth Graham makes Rattie say in that glorious fantasy “The Wind in the Willows”……. “Believe me my young friend there *nothing* – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats – simply messing about in boats”. This sentiment has found expression in the hours and hours of unselfish toil that members have put in through the years and are indeed putting it now on behalf of the Club.

As the years have passed, permanent friendships have been forged in the Club family so that the not-so-young often cling steadfastly to their membership treasuring the memories of experiences of former days down the river and hoping, from time to time, to recapture some of the joys of those days.

So here then is the record of the Club from Alpha to – no, not Omega, for we all trust that in the next sixty years, it will add still more laurels to its long history. May the yet unwritten account which will, we hope form a sequel to these pages, prove that indeed the St. Denys Amateur Rowing club has continued in the worthy tradition of sportsmanship and good fellowship which its founders established. It is to the future that we look to build yet more firmly of both past and present.

Chapter 9

“HONORIS CAUSA” Our Trophies and their Winners

A number of trophies have in the course of time come into the Club’s possession

of the Club. There is a distinct record of a challenge cup existing in the Club in the very early days of its existence, but Walley Green had won it outright. Therefore, in 1894 Mrs.Hoskyns, wife of the vicar of St. Denys, kindly offered to present another cup to the Club. In the fall of the following year, the Vicar wrote to the Committee stating that the new challenge cup to be presented by his wife and himself, was now ready and that he wished to make the following condition:-

1. That not less than 5 members shall start for the race.
2. That three out of the 5 shall be residents of the tything of Portswood and St. Denys.
3. That the race shall be rowed in skiffs.
4. That the race shall be rowed on regatta day.

All but the third condition have become redundant. The Cup, now and for many years past, has been awarded to the winner of a knock-out competition in which the competitors row in pairs from a starting line off the stage up to marks off “The Oaks” and back again, a distance of approximately 1,000 yards. In recent years, certain concessions have been made to novices rowing in the competition for the first time, by introducing them into the later rounds. Winners of the “Hoskyns Cup” to date, as recorded on the plinth are as follows:-

THE “HOSKYNS CUP”

Names of winners recorded on the plinth.

1896 W.E.Green 1926 E.S.Snowdon

1897 “ 1927 M.Andrews

1898 “ 1928 “

1899 “ 1929 “

1904 “ 1930 W.Long

1905 F.A.Gosselin 1931 C.Ellery

1906 G.F.Russell 1932 “

1907 C.H.Gordon 1933 M.Cotton

1908 “ 1934 C.Ellery

1910 E.Dowding 1935 “

1911 L.Hawkins 1936 J.Andrews

1912 G.F.Russell 1937 W.J.Griffiths

1913 A.Brunt 1938 “

1914 C.H.Lewis 1939 ) Not awarded owing to hostilities

1915 F.Lee 1045 )

1916 A.Brunt 1946 C.Ellery

1917 “ 1947 K.Reeve

1918 L.Petty 1948 “

1919 Not awarded. 1942 P.Isaacs

1920 W.E.Green 1950 J.Rivers

1921 C.H.Gordon 1951 Not awarded

1922 L.Bunn 1952 P.Blandford

1923 L.Bunn

1924 E.S.Snowdon

1925 C.Cook

The “Lee” Shield. Fred Lee was a member during World War I and won the Hoskyns Cup in 1915. When, sometime later, he was obliged to resign his membership he made a donation to the Club to be put to any purpose the Club thought fit. A shield, henceforth to be called the “Lee” Shield was therefore obtained, to be presented to the winning crew of the Pair Oar Competition. This competition had been running for some years since 1918 as a result of such interest in similar events in the Coalporters’ and Millbrook regattas. Bobby Bunn and the writer rowed together for a number of seasons in these events for all comers, and on one occasion, off Day Suumers’ old premises, we were just “pipped” in our heat by a pair who came up from Poole. We followed the fortunes of this pair in the final with great interest and were very disappointed to see the bow man wrench his rowlock socket right out of the boat. Nothing daunted and quick as lightning however, they changed their rowlocks over and rowed on to victory! Later the writer was privileged to pair up with Maurice Andrews, and for three years in succession just before the award of this shield we were the winners of the Club competition.

1930 P.B.Arnold 1946 C.Ellery C.Ellery R.Sutcliffe

1931 G.Rivers 1947 E.Isaacs C.Ellery P.Isaacs

1932 E.G.Arnold 1948 A.Mansbridge J.B.Andrews N.Bennett

1933 J.B.Andrews 1949 D.Arthurs W.J.Griffiths J.Arthurs

1934 C.Ellery 1950 J.Rivers M.Cotton E.Atherton

1935 R.Wood 1951 Not awarded W.Creer

1937 C.Ellery 1952 E.Isaacs E.Giles P.Isaacs

The “Scow Shield”. This shield is awarded to the winner of the knockout Scow Competition, an event that is very popular among the sailing members of the Club. The boats are sent in pairs round a triangular course above Cobden Bridge within easy view of everyone from the Club wharf, a great advantage to those who like to follow the fortunes of the competitors. Whilst the Shield has gone round very well, no one would dispute the f act that Bill Long who has won it twice, is an opponent always to be reckoned with.

Winners to date are:-

1937 W.Long 1948 K.Buckett

1938 R.Gosney 1949 E.Isaacs

1939 K.Buckett 1950 D.Turnbull

1940-45 No races owing to hostilities 1951 G.Rivers

1946 K.Reeve 1952 G.Rivers

1947 2.Long

It is of interest to add that a new scow competition is now being run and has got beyond the experimental stage. In order to give everybody more than one chance of sailing, a “Points” Competition has been evolved. As we now have three scows, a member may challenge any pair of his colleagues who happen to be available, to a race. 5 points are awarded for a win, 3 for second place, and 1 for third place. Then added to the average is ¼ point for a win, so that the man with a greater number of races to his credit will be recognised over the man with the same average worked out on fewer races.

The “Rivers” Cup, donated by George Rivers for the winner of this competition is not the least treasured of our possessions. It was held for the first time in 1950 by Bill Long, and again in 1951. P.Miles won it in 1952.

The “Whaler” shield. In 1937, The Club won first prize in the Service Whaler Sailing Race held at the Town Regatta, and the crew decided to purchase a shield on which would be recorded their own success and any future successes of whalers entered in similar events. It was a happy thought on the part of the crew, and the Club was glad to be able to record permanently the following successes:-

1. Civic Corporation Regatta

Southampton 1937

Service Whaler Sailing Race

Won by

St. Denys Amateur Rowing Club Crew

J.Rivers J.Wright

K. Buckett D.Turnbull

1. Southampton Town Regatta 1938

Service Whaler Sailing Race

2nd place

K.Buckett J.Wright

J.Lewis R.Gosney

1. Southampton Town Regatta

Service Whaler Sailing Race 1st place

W.Long K.Buckett

C.Ellery K.Reeve

1. Folly Regatta 1946

Whippingham I.W.

2nd place

G.Rivers L.McQuade

K.Reeve C.Day

C.Ellery

1. Folly Regatta 1948

2nd place

P.Isaacs D.Bishop

E.Isaacs K.Reeve

J. Petty

Coxswain C.Ellery

1. Bursledon Regatta 1948

1st place

D.Turnbull C.Day

D.Bishop

1. Southampton Town Regatta 1949

1st place

G.Rivers D.Bishop

J.Rivers J.Kennell

A.Cavell

1. Southampton Town Regatta 1950

2nd place

D.Turnbull C.Ellery

D.Arthurs J.Bayley

1. Southampton Town Regatta 1951

1st place

W.Long R.G.Gosney

D.Humby A.Blandford

1. 3rd place

E.Isaacs J.Bayley

J.Leaper B.Blandford

1. Southampton Town Regatta 1952

2nd place

D.Turnbull K.Emery

D.Trimm S.Wood

The “Arthur Rider” Tankard. Arthur, or “Barney” Rider was an extremely popular lad who made his mark in Club affairs during the “thirties”. Like many more, he was called to the colours during the war and as a result of his experience his health was completely undermined. It was a great shock to everyone however, when the Club heard of his death. That the Club was often in his thoughts is borne out of his wish that a donation should be accepted and put to any purpose the Committee might think appropriate. This touching evidence of “Barney’s” continued regard for the Club was used to furnish a trophy on which his name might be commemorated. The Tankard is awarded each year to the novice who, in the opinion of the Sports Committee has made the most progress either in rowing or sailing during the season.

Those who have so far merited the award are:-

K. Reeves 1947

N.Bennett 1948

K.Churcher 1949

E.Atherton 1950

Not awarded 1951

P.Blandford 1952

“Festival of Britain Shield. To our collection of trophies was recently added this commemorative shield with the object of recording all other sailing successes including handicap events.

“Redwing” 14ft. O.A. Handicap Race 2nd Place. D.Turnbull, R.O. Bailey

“Pixie” 18ft. O.A. Handicap Race 3rd Place. G.M. Cotton, D.Arthurs

(Both events in Festival of Britain Regatta, Southampton, 1951)